

ChamberFest Cleveland Concert 2: “The Independent Spirit” (June 16)

by Daniel Hathaway



Although ChamberFest Cleveland dubbed its third concert “The Independent Spirit,” it might just as aptly have been titled “The Indefatigable Pianist” in honor of Roman Rabinovich. He spent the entire evening at the keyboard on Saturday, June 16 in Mixon Hall, flawlessly spinning out one elegantly articulated phrase after another.

The evening began with business — the outgoing and incoming board presidents were keen to move some ChamberFest merchandise at intermission, and presented an engaging infomercial hawking historic T-shirts. Then clarinetist Franklin Cohen and violist Yura Lee joined Rabinovich in a playful performance of Mozart’s K. 498 *Trio*. The piece either has something or nothing to do with the ninepin game of skittles (*Kegels* in German) that the composer was fond of playing, but the trio put this agreeable little piece of *Hausmusik* across with charm. Their unanimity in articulating the little four-note roulades in the opening theme was admirable.

Next, violinist Diana Cohen and Rabinovich took the audience on a wild ride — not in that fast machine of another John Adams piece, but in the composer’s *Road Moves*. This one begins (“Relaxed Groove”) and ends (“40% swing”) with movements constructed from dizzying chains of repetitive rhythms that vary ever so slightly from time to time. The middle movement (“Meditative”) gives the performers a break at an oasis of long, lyrical lines before taking off again. Cohen quipped before playing the piece that it was going to be more fun for the audience than for the performers, but she and Rabinovich dispatched Adams’ treacherous rhythmic patterns with cool confidence. Sudden explosions of sound and a false ending added to the fun. In the

super-energetic last movement, you had to wonder what “100% swing” might have sounded like.



Brahms’ *Piano Trio No. 1* made its second appearance at the Festival on Saturday evening. Herbert and Rabinovich had played the work earlier in a ChamberFest cameo at the AHA! Festival at Cleveland State University with violinist David Bowlin, now off to other engagements and replaced by Alexi Kenney.

With two string players in their early 20s and a pianist in his early 30s, you might have expected a reading long on vitality but short on depth, but not so. This was a performance fresh with youthfulness but tempered by uncanny maturity. The trio played with extraordinary ensemble, produced a lean, sonorous sound, and left few details unexamined. The lengthy first movement ended with an exquisite denouement led by Kenney’s expressive playing. The Scherzo began with Mendelssohnian delicacy, then turned muscular. Herbert contributed a poignant cello solo in the Adagio, and the unflagging Rabinovich was still able to summon up his magical touch in the finale. Bravos resounded from the packed house even before the last note died away.

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