

ChamberFest's "Forging New Paths" to highlight Rabinovich Brahms arrangement

by Jarrett Hoffman



“When a father-in-law asks, it’s the law,” Roman Rabinovich said during a recent conversation. As fans of ChamberFest Cleveland know, that father-in-law is co-artistic director Franklin Cohen. His request? An arrangement of Brahms’ *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel* to be performed at the Festival — and his son-in-law happily obliged.

Rabinovich’s nonet version of that solo piano work will receive its premiere on Saturday, June 23 at 7:30 pm in Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music. And the web of connections in that program, titled “Forging New Paths,” is worth spending an evening on itself. There’s the Handel-to-Brahms thread: on one end of the program is the Baroque composer’s *Trio Sonata in c*, HWV 386a, while on the other end are Brahms’ Handel Variations — in their new clothes picked out by Rabinovich. And in between is Ligeti’s homage to Brahms: the *Trio for Horn, Violin, and Piano* — a rare instrumentation for which the big B also composed.

You’ll see Rabinovich at the harpsichord in the Handel sonata, but our conversation focused on his arrangement of the Brahms for flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon, string quartet, and double bass. He’s no stranger to arranging, but he’s always scaled down large-ensemble works to smaller forces. This time, with the Handel Variations, it’s the reverse.

“It’s a piece I used to play quite a bit, and Frank particularly loves it,” Rabinovich said. “I listened to a lot of Brahms symphonies and serenades to try to create that full-orchestra sound, but keep the intimacy of the solo playing — it was a very interesting process.”

Rabinovich noted that Brahms' original is already symphonic in nature. "I believe Brahms thought in terms of an orchestra — you can hear all the different groups of instruments and colors of register."

Were there any particular challenges in making the arrangement? "To find the full, warm Brahmsian sound in the triumphant part of the piece without having it be harsh. I don't know if I succeeded or not — we'll see."

Next week, we'll speak with Roman Rabinovich the pianist as he takes on another chamber assignment: Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*.

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