

## CityMusic Cleveland: all-Brahms at St. Jerome in Collinwood (Oct. 24)

by David Kulma



The towering Trinity mosaic behind the altar at Collinwood's St. Jerome Church was an apt image to frame CityMusic Cleveland's 15th season opener on Wednesday, October 24. Featuring violinist Tessa Lark and cellist Edward Arron, this peripatetic orchestra led by music

director Avner Dorman enlivened this holy space with two grandiose, yet intricate works by one of classical music's own trinity of B's: Johannes Brahms.

Lark and Arron are both returning soloists with CityMusic. Arron took part in Beethoven's Triple Concerto in 2005, while Lark has been heard thrice since 2016 in solo concertos by Dvořák, Corigliano, and — most recently in May — Beethoven.

And no wonder they've been brought back. Teamed up for Brahms' powerful *Double Concerto*, this duo sculpted eloquent ideas throughout the composer's sprawling, final orchestral work. Arron's engrossing opening cadenza was matched by Lark's own. They were equally at home in the calm beauty of the second movement and the boisterous bluster of the third. Despite a few questionable chords in the orchestra along the way, by and large Dorman and CityMusic accompanied with suppleness as Lark and Arron shared an amazing musical wavelength.

After the snack-filled intermission, Dorman and company returned for the most pastoral of Brahms' four symphonies: No. 2 in D. Brahms requires firm shaping to bring his complex counterpoint and abstract paragraphs to life, but Dorman has a tendency to use only deceleration to sculpt the sound.

The first movement rarely took advantage of Brahms' churning forward drives. The brash opening of the second was out of character both with this plangent music and the composer's own markings, while the sense of ensemble suffered during the third movement's trios because of the fast tempo. (St. Jerome has a buoyant hang time that makes fast playing lack clarity.)

The finale was the most successful. Dorman chose a sensible, consistent tempo, and a beautifully tuned, ringing trombone chord at the end sent out the obligatory spinal shiver.

While some may wonder why CityMusic plays the same repertoire you can hear at Severance Hall, their goal to bring free concerts to neighborhoods around the area is commendable — as is the depth of talent in Northeast Ohio that makes this professional freelance ensemble play so well together.

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