

ChamberFest at Blackstone Organ House (Apr. 11)

by David Kulma

The second event in Chamberfest Cleveland's new House Concert Series on April 11 was a feast for the ears as well as the eyes, set at the astounding Blackstone Organ House on Lake Erie in Bratenahl and featuring two ChamberFest regulars, violinist Alexi Kenney and pianist Orion Weiss.

Fittingly, the evening opened with Hannah Koby playing J.S. Bach's *Fugue in E-flat*, BWV 552/2 on the 7400-pipe Aeolian-Skinner organ. Koby handled this overwhelming work as it grew from its initial subject to the grand, full-bodied pedal restatement at the end. Her careful registration helped delineate the triple fugue.

The rest of the program featured marvelous chamber music-making by Kenney and Weiss. Both played with effervescence, precision and an admirable spontaneity that made each work sound like a brand new musical gem.

The duo played Charles Ives' delightfully entertaining *Violin Sonata No. 4*, subtitled "Children's Day at the Camp Meeting," with an amazing vibrancy. Its three movements visit most of the composer's multifarious moods.

The opening Allegro quickly becomes polytonal, while the breathtakingly beautiful slow movement includes both poignant calm and ferocious dissonance. The playful finale hilariously quotes Robert Lowry's hymn *Shall We Gather at the River?*, which Kenney and Weiss played with complete panache, leaning into the composer's weirdness.

Airs du rossignol, arranged by violinist Samuel Dushkin and Igor Stravinsky from the composer's 1909 opera *The Nightingale*, led directly into Beethoven's *Violin Sonata No. 10 in G*, Op. 96.

The prickly Stravinsky work is deliciously piquant with its bird-like high trills, angular lines, and night-drenched music.

With its trills, Beethoven's opening theme bridged the two pieces with an enjoyable aural rhyme. Kenney and Weiss played the buoyant opening movement like a charming musical story. Equally delightful were the calming slow movement, the edge-of-your-seat Scherzo, and the just-plain-fun finale.

After intermission, Weiss gave a spectacular performance of Debussy's *L'Isle joyeuse* on the House's resonant Bösendorfer Imperial grand piano. Framing this virtuosic showpiece as an exciting poem, Weiss made this virtuosic showpiece sound effortless.

Kenney returned for George Enescu's *Sonata No. 3 in a*, heavily influenced by Romanian folk music and clearly written by a virtuosic violinist — as Enescu was. Kenney showed off his lush tone and immaculate intonation in music spiced with augmented-second intervals, joining Weiss in a joyful spin through its three movements.

For an encore, the duo brought things full circle with Bach's E-flat major third movement from his *Sonata No. 4 in c* for violin and keyboard, BWV 1017. This lovely, calming music was the perfect way to end this perfect concert.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 23, 2019.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)