

ChamberFest Cleveland stuns with season opener (June 13)

by Rory O'Donoghue



ChamberFest Cleveland descended from the heavens with “Under the Influence,” the inaugural concert of its eighth season on June 13 in CIM’s Mixon Hall. Exquisite interpretation, unparalleled finesse, and delightful music-making tied the evening’s selections together in performances of simply the highest caliber.

First up was Beethoven’s *Trio for Piano, Clarinet, and Cello in B-flat*, one of the composer’s early triumphs. The music brims with life and possibility, and can virtually play itself. As such, it often underdelivers in concert because it comes across just fine without too much effort. Thankfully, this ensemble went the extra mile. Clarinetist Franklin Cohen bloomed with a sparkling sound, at times appropriately playful and others introspective. Cellist Peter Wiley countered Cohen with more reserve. The two have been playing together for decades, since their student days at Marlboro, and their

comfort with one another was readily apparent. The star of the show was not the old friends, however, but 19-year-old piano phenom Evren Ozel. The daring creativity and fierce passion Ozel channeled surpasses musicians twice or even three times his age.



Penderecki's brutalist String Trio followed, performed with utmost intensity by violinist Diana Cohen, violist Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, and cellist Oliver Herbert. Penderecki's music is incessantly demonic and by turns sinister, lachrymose, and aching, and the group navigated its bleak harmonic landscape with uncanny ease. Perhaps most impressive was their intonation and ensemble blend — they fired off at the same synaptic impulse.

The second half began with Heinz Holliger's *Albumblätter, getuscht* for piano, which pianist Roman Rabinovich called an ideal segue into the final piece of the night, Schumann's *Piano Quartet in E-flat*. He asked that the audience hold their applause until after the latter so that the two works could be played *attacca* in homage to Schumann's profound influence on Holliger. Rabinovich said, "Holliger is one of the greatest oboists, and greatest composers of today." While some may find that a difficult claim to back up, the Holliger was nonetheless enjoyable in its expansive and turbulent course.

Following the Quartet's premiere, Schumann noted that it "seemed to please players and listeners alike." If the infectious enthusiasm passed around by the ChamberFest performers on stage was any indication, this was also true of their rendition. De Stadt, Herbert, violinist Yura Lee, and pianist Adam Golka were all sensational.



The group took a brisk tempo during the first movement, “Allegro ma non troppo,” a choice they fully defended with exuberant playing. The “Scherzo: Molto vivace” was driving and intense, although the piano sometimes verged on too loud. Oddly, their already impressive intonation got even better as they went along, and they basked in the sweet and sublime “Andante cantabile.” Their “Finale: Vivace” was boisterous, resolute, and thoroughly convincing — their final note was a warm celebration of the evening’s success.

Photos by Gary Adams.

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