

Andrew Sords & friends in Rocky River (Sept. 22)

by David Kulma



As violinist Andrew Sords criss-crosses the continent playing violin concerti, he builds into his schedule hometown concerts to play with his Cleveland-area colleagues. “An Afternoon of Romantic Chamber Music,” the program he anchored for Rocky River Presbyterian Church’s Artist Concert Series on Sunday, September 22, was an opportunity to perform music

written specifically by composers to play with their friends.

Friends creating music together is the birth story of much of classical music. A performer asks a composer friend to write a new work for them. A composer asks a performer friend to help bring a new idea for a work to fruition. Sometimes the resulting work is even meant for both to play together as a model of friendly cooperation.

Dmitri Shostakovich wrote his *Piano Quintet*, Op. 57 for himself and the Beethoven Quartet, who premiered this work and most of his string quartets. In five movements, it mixes most of Shostakovich’s usual moods to great effect. Sords, violinist Mari Sato, violist Eric Wong, cellist Nathanael Matthews, and pianist Elizabeth DeMio brought a restrained clarity to its broodingly gray Fugue, and a vigorous punch to its surprisingly ebullient and quick-witted Scherzo. The jewel of the set was the fourth-movement Intermezzo, where the performers plumbed its profound depths.

The first half was dedicated to smaller works featuring subsets of the players. Most in line with the Shostakovich was Mahler’s Brahmsian *Piano Quartet*, which he wrote

while still a student. Sords, Wong, Matthews, and DeMio emphasized this single movement's moody, motivic intricacy, and Sords brought ravishing flair to the cadenza-like passage that helps wind this music down.

As DeMio noted from the stage, Moritz Moszkowski is mostly known these days to pianists for his etudes. Nevertheless, his enjoyable, drama-filled *Suite for Two Violins and Piano*, Op. 71 can still hold the ear — as Sords', Sato's, and DeMio's delightful performance made clear. For even more flash to end the first half, the same trio played violinist-composer Pablo de Sarasate's exciting romp *Navarra*. The two violinists obviously enjoyed this virtuosic barnburner while DeMio held down the musical fort.

The concert opened with a trio arrangement of the sixth of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances*, which set the tone for the generally light-hearted first half. Sords, Matthews, and DeMio played this popular dance, full of sharp-witted changes of tempo, with aplomb, and Sords indulged his penchant for a surprisingly understated, glassy tone in soft dynamics.

The encore was the sparkling highlight of the afternoon: the Scherzo from Robert Schumann's *Piano Quintet*, Op. 44. This burst of scalar glory made me look forward to hearing this ensemble play the entire work in the future.

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