

Local 4 Music Fund: Duo Anime (Jan. 14)

by Jarrett Hoffman



A varied, compelling, and concise program came to life through excellent performances when percussionists Andrew Pongracz and Mell Csicsila of Duo Anime visited Survival Kit on January 14. The live-streamed concert was presented as part of the Local 4 Music Fund's Tuning In series.

The program spanned from the Baroque era to the 20th century, and from mallets to a menagerie of unpitched instruments. It was mostly laid out in sets, creating the satisfying feeling of turning from one chapter to the next. On the technological side of things, the video went through periods of freezing up, and the camera fell askew a couple of times, but more importantly, the audio was pristine throughout.

Marimba minimalism started us off in the form of Daniel Dorff's *Dance Etude No. 1*. A lovely opening, it was the perfect combination of rhythmic energy and harmonic serenity in this strong performance.

That gave way to the first grouping: three pieces by three contrasting composers, linked together by the ideas of counterpoint and invention. It was fascinating to move from Bach to Takemitsu to David Levitan, though you needed to be fully alert to keep track of the music since the on-screen titles misidentified a few pieces.

First up in this set was Bach's *Prelude and Fugue No. 10*, arranged by the Safri Duo. For the Prelude only, Csicsila moved to the vibraphone — useful for sustaining the

longer notes of the melody, though the metallic sound in combination with the woodiness of the marimba felt a little out of place for Bach. The Fugue lost some of its speed and excitement in translation from the keyboard, but despite that, it was enjoyable to hear J.S. in new clothes.

Takemitsu's *Crosshatch* revisited the combination of marimba and vibes, now with Pongracz taking up the metal bars. This beautiful, mysterious, psychological, and much more modern music was a better match for that instrumentation, and its rhythmic similarity to the Bach was intriguing.

The most surprising piece in the set was Levitan's *Invention No. 1*, which not only departed from mallet percussion, but also from pitch. The instruments — chosen by the duo, given the composer's open-ended directions — included metal coffee cans, a circular saw blade, dragons' mouths (temple blocks), and a stack of cracked cymbals. Csicsila explained that the rhythms of the piece modulate in a similar way to the key centers of Bach — whether or not you fully digested that from the performance, it was bewitching.



Csicsila and Pongracz returned to the marimbas for three Classical and Romantic works. The middle selection, Enrique Granados' *Spanish Dance No. 5* in an arrangement by Earl Hatch, was a stunner, full of beautiful tremolos, nicely timed rubato, and in general an extra layer of interpretive TLC.

Granados' neighbors were Daquin's *Le Coucou* (arr. Steve Mathiesen) and Mussorgsky's "The Old Castle" from *Pictures at an Exhibition* (arr. Robert Conselatore). As heard on mallets, the quickly decaying notes of the Mussorgsky melody lent that piece a more

spare and ruminative mood than usual — the perfect case of an arrangement not only functioning well, but offering its own unique experience of the music.

Next came a spread of Kabalevsky. One little, delightful slice of life after another, the beautiful set of nine miniatures arranged by Donald Miller absolutely charms. And the “bonus” tenth piece, James Moore’s arrangement of *The Galloping Comedians*, capped off the set with pure and undeniable joy. The contrast between Csicsila’s brightly articulated melody and Pongracz’s gentle accompaniment was a nice touch.



After a short reset of the stage, the duo was ready to go with the finale: Wayne Siegel’s *42nd Street Rondo*. Dedicated to bucket drummers, the piece served as a nice programmatic echo to the Levitan. The sudden rise and fall of the dynamics, the mesmerizing rhythms, and the range of timbres made it an engrossing conclusion to the hour-long concert.

Given the variety of sounds conjured by only two players — in a specialty where wearing masks is quite simply *no problemo* — this concert made you wonder why we haven’t heard more percussion during the pandemic. Unfortunately, there’s still time to change that.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com January 26, 2020.

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