

## CityMusic Cleveland: “Musical Matrix” (Oct. 2)

by Peter Feher



CityMusic Cleveland has always been on a mission. This season, the group is staying true to its community vision — music for everyone, and concerts for free — even if performances look a little different in 2021. The programming is slimmed down from chamber orchestra to chamber music, and there’s an increased emphasis on new works (each program this season features a world premiere).

Cleverly, CityMusic’s latest concert led listeners through these changes one step at a time. “Musical Matrix” took transformation as its theme, and each piece on the October 2 program at the Maltz Performing Arts Center (the second of two performances) put its spin on the subject.

Saturday’s world premiere, Kotoka Suzuki’s *Furusato* (“*Home of the Heart*”), found inspiration in Japanese children’s songs. Few hints of melody emerge, except in the work’s final movement, which has violin, viola, and cello lining up in a handful of repeated gestures amid mostly atonal music. But Suzuki’s transformations go deeper and shine through in her work’s instrumentation.

In addition to string trio, *Furusato* incorporates an electronic track, along the lines of a white-noise machine. The sound of lapping waves that begins the piece grows into swells of string trills and tremolos midway through. Likewise, hollow knocking on the trunk of a tree becomes the performers tapping on the wood of their instruments, followed by pizzicato notes. Violinist Yoojin Jang, violist Masumi Per Rostad, and cellist Mimi Hwang made music out of even the simplest sounds.

The concert's opener, three movements from Max Bruch's *Eight Pieces for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano*, showed a more straightforward use of source material. "Rumanian Melody" (No. 5) borrows a minor-key folk tune, whose affect rubs off on the next piece in the set, "Nachtgesang" (No. 6). Rostad and clarinetist Daniel Gilbert handled their solo and unison lines sensitively, and a final movement, *Allegro vivace, ma non troppo* (No. 7), turned the mood sprightly.

Another trio on the program, Darius Milhaud's *Suite for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano*, took the grab-bag approach. The work's fourth movement alone (what CityMusic programmed Saturday) interpolates Brazilian samba, the tune of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," and many of the trappings of French chamber music. Milhaud paints a surrealist, not entirely serious picture, and the CityMusic players found the humor in the piece.

Mozart's g minor Piano Quartet closed out the evening and let pianist Donna Lee come to the fore. This work is less chamber collaboration, more keyboard concerto, and Lee was a solid soloist, while Jang led the trio of string players with the confidence of concertmaster and conductor.

As for borrowed material, Mozart's piece inverted the "Musical Matrix" idea. The composer did repurpose melodies, but his own. A section from the third movement of this Quartet would wind up reused in a piano work written a couple months later — a fitting end for any concert, suggesting there's always more music.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 20, 2021.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)