

ChamberFest Cleveland: *Color X Expanse* (June 24)

by Daniel Hathaway



At the Cultural Arts Center at Disciples Church on Friday, June 24, the repertoire was indeed both colorful and expansive as the excellent musicians of ChamberFest Cleveland explored works ranging from the sentimental (Fritz Kreisler's *Three Pieces for Piano Trio*) to the evanescent (Gabriel Fauré's *Piano Quintet No. 1*), from the stark and compact (George Walker's *Piano Sonata No. 5*) to the delightfully verbose (Zoltán Kodály's *Duo*

for Violin and Cello, Op. 7).

Violinist Alexi Kenney, cellist Jonathan Swensen, and pianist Andrius Žlabys raised the curtain with three light pieces arranged by a virtuoso violinist famous for his encores. Kreisler's takes on *The Old Refrain*, *Farewell to Cucullain* (a.k.a. *Londonderry Air* or *Oh Danny Boy*), and *Miniature Viennese March* worked equally well as preludial bon-bons.

The CFC trio let the pieces speak for themselves without adding a layer of interpretation over Kreisler's affecting music. The charming little march, which sounded as though it had wandered in from a Klezmer wedding, needed nothing more than to be played straight.

Changing the air in the room, Roman Rabinovich launched George Walker's fifth and final Piano Sonata with its striking opening gesture,— and maintained the surface tension of this compact work for all of its nearly five minutes' duration. Its dissonant but attractive musical language and strong motivic integration attract rather than repel the ear, and it's all over before you quite realize what has happened. Rabinovich played it with authority — and affection.

Two new faces joined ChamberFest for the Kodály *Duo* — violinist Geneva Lewis and cellist Gabriel Martins — completely charming the audience with their lucid, attentive playing of this musically garrulous work. In the wrong hands (or ears), it could have sounded disjunct and unfocused, but the two musicians reacted immediately to sudden changes in the narrative. Even musical non-sequiturs sounded intentional. Their concentration was infectious.

The evening ended with Fauré's First Piano Quintet, exquisitely played by Kenney, Lewis, Martins, and Rabinovich, joined by violist Dimitri Murrath. For much of the work, shifting chords supply the background like clouds drifting in a calm sky, subtly changing their shape but never going quite where you expect them to — until the last movement when textures change in favor of triumphant chord progressions.

The ChamberFest musicians patiently and skillfully shaped this performance, earning an enthusiastic ovation — and the ice cream that appeared afterward, courtesy of Mitchell's.

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