

**ENCORE:*****Tales of Wunderkinds***

by Noah Auby



If their first tale of July 2022 was any indication, ENCORE Chamber Music Institute’s “Storytelling” Music & Ideas Festival is true to its name. On July 1st, ENCORE premiered and livestreamed “Tales of Wunderkinds: The Hunt & Chase” — a formidable continuation of this year’s primarily narrative-driven Music & Ideas Festival. Interestingly, Jorg Widmann’s *Hunt* would be the only piece from the evening’s program to share a word with this title. I watched the livestream.

Performed by a string quartet with periodic shouting from violinist (and ENCORE artistic director) Jinjoo Cho, the players flawlessly executed the intended discordant quality of the piece. If Widmann’s work is accurately titled, the first half of the night’s program might refer to the conventional winner-take-all “hunt” for success. The latter half would then be the “chase” — a notion of success rooted in love, collaboration, and understanding as opposed to hatred, competition, and ignorance.

The evening began with Cho interviewing psychologist, performance coach, and musician Dana Fonteneau. With this interview and its ensuing Q&A, concertgoers got a brief glimpse into the life of a female musician who does a lot more than just play music — all in the name of bettering humanity.

With a nod to the upcoming national holiday, violinists Kiarra Saito-Beckman and JuEun Lee opened the program with a straightforward performance of Bruce Dukov’s arrangement of “The Stars and Stripes Forever.” For better or worse, this overtly patriotic theme saw its beginning, middle, and end here.

Pianist Hyunsoo Kim joined the two violinists for Pablo de Sarasate’s delightfully nostalgic *Navarra*. The trio showcased their sonic coordination with masterful choices of tempos, dynamics, and articulations.

Jean Françaix's *Trio à cordes* was performed by — you guessed it — another trio, this one consisting of violinist Brendan Shea, violist Eric Wong, and cellist Jean-Michel Fonteneau. In contrast to the Sarasate, these players occasionally struggled to match one another's energy levels. Still, if applause qualifies as evidence, the performance was empirically well-received.

Following a brief intermission, violinists Brendan Shea, Kiarra Saito-Beckman, Sibbi Bermhardsson, and JuEun Lee faithfully performed Mozart's *Variations for Four Violins, "Ah! Vous dirai-je, Maman."* Even those with limited knowledge of classical music would recognize its theme from their childhoods. As the well-conveyed variations picked up speed, the performance captured the essence of the "chase."

The evening concluded with a performance of Felix Mendelssohn's *String Quintet No. 1* — the only quintet on the program. Violinists Jinjoo Cho and Steve Miahky, violists Eric Wong and Ivo-Jan van der Werff, and cellist Jean-Michel Fonteneau did an excellent job of sending audience members off with a feeling of triumph and melancholic beauty.

As the program notes state, "Mozart and Mendelssohn were prodigies of their own time, but at what cost?" If these *Wunderkinds* suffered any mental toll in creating their works, that question was answered by tonight's vigorous performances of these masterful works.

As the notes go on to say, "*Tales of Wunderkinds* might leave the audience feeling pressured and tense, but with an inspired take on 'the chase' for success, and what that might mean for the well-being of our society." If we are to interpret this charitably, the "chase" in relation to the "hunt" is a way of approaching success that will only yield greater happiness for the future of humanity.

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