

Rocky River Chamber Music Society: The Butler Piano Trio (Feb. 6)

by Kevin McLaughlin



On February 6, the Butler Piano Trio (Sandy Yamamoto, violin, Joshua Gindele, cello, and Colette Valentine, piano), treated the West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church audience to a compelling evening of generous and potent music making.

Abundantly evident in the performance of Rachmaninoff's *Trio élégiaque No. 1* — a cohesive single-movement work written when the composer was just nineteen — was the Butlers' special chemistry. The group seemed to exhibit an extrasensory awareness of shared phrasing, expression, and rhythmic timing. Valentine

managed Rachmaninoff's virtuosic piano writing with ease, trading iterations of the elegiac theme with the strings in powerful combination. Three instruments were present onstage, but the music seemed to emit from a single voice.

Beethoven's *Trio in D*, Op. 70, composed in 1808, is nicknamed "Ghost" for its eerie Largo movement. According to the unsigned program notes, Carl Czerny thought it evoked Hamlet's meeting with the ghost of his father, but it was in fact part of Beethoven's sketch for a never-completed *Macbeth* opera. The Butlers' performance was taut and aptly unnerving. In the dramatic Largo the group relentlessly pressed the repeated rhythmic figure (triplet and sixteenths), conjuring a doomed march imposed by a spectral martinet.

After intermission, violist Lembi Veskimets joined the ensemble for an impassioned performance of the Schumann Op. 47 *Piano Quartet in E-flat*. Chemistry and synchronicity kept company here as well. Written with his wife Clara in mind, the quartet Schumann produced in 1842 (his so-called "chamber music year") asks much of the

piano, and Valentine handled the role with lightness and skill. Gindele provided many lovely moments but especially in the Adagio, singing with flexible, lissome authority. Yamamoto, too, was a valuable protagonist, delivering reliable rhythm and clarity. And what a pleasure to hear Viskimets add her nimble-fingered middle voice.

The crystalline acoustics of West Shore Unitarian made for excellent chamber music-making and listening. Eagerly awaited are the next concerts in the Rocky River Chamber Music Society series: the cello-percussion duo New Morse Code on March 13 and an all-Stravinsky concert headlined by the *Wind Octet* and *L'Histoire du Soldat* on May 15.

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