

## ChamberFest Cleveland: “Words Misunderstood” (June 30)

by Mike Telin



On Friday, June 30, ChamberFest Cleveland presented a delightful evening of chamber music to a capacity audience at Dunham Tavern. The program, “Words Misunderstood,” included an oddity by György Ligeti, ear-catching 21st-century works by Caroline Shaw and Gabriella Smith, and some engaging German Romanticism by Max Bruch.

Performed without the “obligatory” intermission, the concert began with György Ligeti’s *Poème symphonique* (for 100 metronomes). An oddity or an absurdity, depending on your point of view, here the work was presented as Ligeti intended — as a serious piece of music. Ten musicians

made their way to their groups of ten mechanical metronomes, each set to a different tempo, all of them sitting on the wooden shelf that ran along three walls of the venue.

After the metronomes were wound to capacity, the players stood facing the audience as conductor Roman Rabinovich made his way to the podium. After a long period of silence, he gave the downbeat signaling the musicians to start their metronomes, which clicked away for approximately ten minutes until the last one had unwound. The applause was serious, as were the bows from the conductor and players.

Honestly, I found the whole experience to be quite fun, especially hearing how the metronomes nearest to me created some fascinating polyrhythms.

Caroline Shaw’s *Limestone & Felt* continued the evening’s theme of rhythm. Violist Teng Li and cellist Jay Campbell brilliantly found their groove as they traded hocketing pizzicatos and whimsical rhythmic motives.

Driving rhythm is front and center in Gabriella Smith's 2015 string quartet *Carrot Revolution*. In her program note Smith writes, "The piece is a patchwork of my wildly contrasting influences and full of weird, unexpected juxtapositions and intersecting planes."

The result is a twelve-minute, magical mix of traditional and extended techniques that grab your attention from the opening percussive tapping on the cello and the scratches and slides in the upper strings. The work hops, skips, and jumps from one theme to the next before relaxing into a strummed ostinato in the cello with Celtic-twined lines floating above. Then, almost imperceptibly, the opening material returns.

Throughout, Diana Cohen and Amy Schwartz Moretti (violins), Jessica Bodner (viola), and Jay Campbell (cello) brilliantly molded Smith's patchwork of motives into an enjoyable whole.

Max Bruch's three-movement *String Octet in B-flat* is a rarity on concert programs. Completed in 1920, the year of the composer's death, the piece is Bruch's final work. The opening "Allegro moderato" begins contemplative before turning to more dramatic themes. The somber "Adagio" is followed by the rousing "Allegro molto," complete with a reappearing folksy melody that stays with you long after the piece is over.

Once again ChamberFest assembled a most skillful group of musicians — Amy Schwartz Moretti, Diana Cohen, Daniel Chong, and James Thompson (violins), Teng Li and Jessica Bodnar (violas), Julie Albers (cello), and Nathan Farrington (bass) — who made an unassuming piece sound like a masterwork. Kudos to Schwartz Moretti, who was challenged with doing the majority of the heavy-lifting. For as much time as she spent at the top of the fingerboard, her tone remained rich and her intonation unblemished.

Adding to the evening's allure, the Dunham Tavern barn is a wonderful venue. Its attractive wood walls and ceiling make it a welcome diversion from institutional recital halls. The warm acoustic also makes it an excellent space to hear music, while its intimacy provides a togetherness between the audience and players without making you feel hemmed in. And it was nice to see people taking advantage of the beautiful weather and exploring the surrounding gardens both before and after the concert.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 13, 2023.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)