

## Rocky River Chamber Music Society: Busch Trio from Amsterdam (Jan. 29)

by Kevin McLaughlin



Making their Cleveland debut on Monday, January 29 in Rocky River Chamber Music Society's already highlight-filled season, the Busch Trio showed itself to be an astonishing young ensemble. They brought youth and energy, yes (all are still in their twenties), but they also brought a fearlessness to their program — trios of Mozart, Ravel,

and Tchaikovsky — and a level of musicianship and precision that made this reviewer's jaw drop.

Brought into being in 2012 during their studies at the Royal College of Music in London, the three were aspiring soloists at the time, but soon realized their shared passion for chamber music. The name suggested itself when violinist Mathieu van Bellen received an instrument known as the “ex- Adolf Busch” — built by G.B. Guadagnini (Turin, 1783), then owned by the eponymous German-Swiss violinist.

The Busch's choice to play on gut strings sets them apart. Subtlety, warmth, and dexterity — especially at the lowest end of dynamics — as well as nimbleness were present in degrees not possible with metal strings. Certainly, van Bellen's and cellist Ori Epstein's delicacy of playing was a revelation in the Mozart and Ravel, but there were times in the Tchaikovsky when the strings sounded muted, or even slightly detached compared to the piano. I wonder if choosing to play on a period-appropriate piano (Ravel's Érard, for example) might be the logical next step.

A well-known Mozart piano trio, K. 502 in B-flat, opened the program in a light-footed and precise performance. Much of the credit for its success belonged to pianist Omri Epstein. A performer with delicacy and touch, he asserted himself appropriately in this

concerto-like trio, his secure and deft pianism steering the proceedings. In the middle Larghetto movement, the cellist provided shy but crucial timbral and rhythmic support to the violinist's and pianist's tender phrases. But suddenly, as if injected with vitamins, all players brightened and began a headlong dash toward the joyous conclusion.

The opening movement of Ravel's *Trio in a* was ravishing, casting an otherworldly sheen. Strict fidelity to the Basque-inflected 3+3+2 rhythms did not prevent musical ebb and flow. The passacaglia and set of variations were beautifully intimate as the players, like three sorcerers, rendered Ravel's exoticism and color without strain or obvious method. The finale too opened with sonic magic — surprising sounds through economical means — before soaring to a euphoric climax.

The second half of the program was devoted to an electrifying performance of Tchaikovsky's *Trio in a*, op. 50, by a composer who confessed a “hostility” for the combination of piano and strings in a chamber setting. Yet this work, with its odd structure (two movements, the second divided in half) and kaleidoscopic succession of moods, is one of the most ambitious and admired trios by a Russian composer from this period.

Dynamics were kept cool (was it the gut strings?), and expression equally so. But the precision that illuminated the Mozart and Ravel also put Tchaikovsky's melodies in high relief, just as the flexibility in the group's playing gave the performance a breathing, organic quality. Tchaikovsky's melancholy won in the end — the piece concludes elegiacally, as it began — but let this not be taken as a bad omen for this promising group. Judging by this performance, their future is most certainly bright.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com February 5, 2024.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)