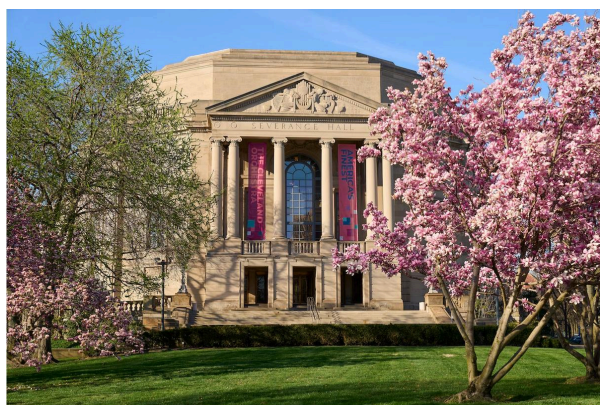


Vocalist Matthias Goerne and pianist Evgeny Kissin shine in recital Sunday at Severance Music Center (Apr. 14)

by Daniel Hathaway | Cleveland Classical
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Severance Music Center, home of the Cleveland Orchestra (Photo: Roger Mastroianni) Roger Mastroianni

CLEVELAND, Ohio — There are people —myself among them — whose favorite Sunday afternoon concerts are either programs of art songs or solo piano music.

German baritone Matthias Goerne and Russian-born pianist Evgeny Kissin checked both of those boxes in Mandel Concert Hall at Severance Music Center on April 14 with a program of *Lieder* and piano Ballades by Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms.

The two-hour recital sponsored by The Cleveland Orchestra included Schumann’s iconic song cycle *Dichterliebe* (Poet’s Love) on poems by Heinrich Heine, all four of Brahms’ *Ballades*, Op. 10, and a selection of Brahms’ settings of Heine lyrics from his *Opus 32 Lieder und Gesänge*.

What made this program different from other vocal recitals was Goerne’s preference for working with musicians who are concert pianists rather than performers who specialize in collaboration.

In an interview published in Toronto’s *LudwigVan*, Goerne said, “‘Most solo pianists are playing this kind of repertoire where there is no text,’ he explains. That means, the pianist has to create their own sense of drama out of the music, and that emphasis on interpretation creates the perfect foil for the German *Lieder* he has made a focal point of his career.”

Thus the rich-voiced Goerne has recorded with such outstanding soloists as Jan Lisiecki and Daniel Trifonov, and chose Kissin as his equal partner for his current tour, which has

so far taken the two to Brussels, Vienna, Madrid, Lisbon, and Paris, and after Cleveland, to Toronto and New York City.

The chemistry between baritone and pianist worked brilliantly in *Dichterliebe*, a cycle obviously written by a pianist who had an intimate knowledge of the color and expressive qualities of the instrument, and who gave the keyboardist the last word by writing eloquent little postludes for most of the sixteen songs in the cycle, and a summarizing coda at the end.

Goerne was chameleonic during the 30-minute cycle, reflecting the variable moods of both poet and composer as they considered the many dimensions of love from the amorous to the sentimental, to the ironic, the tragic, and the amusing. It was clear that both vocalist and pianist had thought through every note and left no detail unexplored.

The second half of the program was all about Brahms, beginning with Kissin's probing performance of the Op. 10 Ballades, of which the Intermezzo: Allegro was especially gripping. Goerne and Kissin lavished attention on the Brahms songs that followed. Even though the dimmed lights made it difficult to follow the texts in the program, the baritone put the emotional content of the songs across clearly and Kissin's interpretation of the wordless piano part spoke volumes. The balances between the two were excellent.

Although forty minutes' worth of Brahms songs might have been too much of a good thing, that didn't bother the good-sized audience, who rewarded Goerne and Kissin with three standing ovations during the program — four if you count the final one after their encore.

The Cleveland Orchestra will offer a series of five recital programs next season, all featuring solo or duo-pianists. Last Sunday's event showed that there's a market for art song in Cleveland, especially after the recent demise of the Art Song Festival. Let's hope there will be more events like the Goerne-Kissin matchup in the future.

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