

## Rocky River Chamber Music Society: clarinet trios among friends (May 6)

by Kevin McLaughlin



What is a little chamber music among friends? Pure enjoyment, that's what. On Monday, May 6 at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church, you got the feeling that the pleasure had by this group — clarinetist Afendi Yusuf, violinist Wesley Collins, and pianist Dawoon Chung — might have

occurred with or without the rapt Rocky River Chamber Music Society audience in attendance.

But, lucky for us, we were. The program — clarinet trios by Mozart, Bruch, and Robert Schumann — brought together not only infrequently performed repertoire, but an obviously friendly group of collaborators.

Speaking of friendships, Mozart's *Trio in E-flat*, K. 498, was written for and first performed by his clarinet muse and pal, Anton Stadler, along with the composer's piano student Franziska Jacquin, and Mozart himself on viola.

Right away Yusuf's creamy clarinet tone commanded attention. Even when Collins and Chung asserted themselves as equal conversationalists — as they did during the opening Andante movement — it was Yusuf's sound that this listener gravitated toward. Whether or not the clarinet was meant to dominate, Chung and Collins seemed content to support Yusuf's singing timbre and elegant phrasing. Collins' light tone on this night seemed more inclined to accompany, though he too could sing out when asked — in the lovely clarinet-violin duet of the Menuetto, for example. Chung's moment in the sun came with the extended flurries of sixteenth notes in the Rondo, nearly causing her associates to stop and show their appreciation.

Bruch may have dedicated his *Eight Pieces*, Op. 83 to his son, Max Felix, a rising clarinet professional, but this ensemble played as if Bruch's music were written for them. Their familiarity with the work — of which only movements 1, 3, 6, and 7 were performed — showed. There were many lovely moments, with lyrical lines distributed equally between clarinet and viola. In the sixth movement (*Ruhiges Tempo, mit zartem Ausdruck*), a lovely nocturne neither sad nor happy, Yusuf's clarinet made as if to cheer up Collins' viola. In the final movement of the set (*Lebhaft, sehr markiert*), Yusuf and Collins traded major-key fanfares that seemed to signal triumph over any preceding melancholy.

In *Märchenerzählungen* ("Fairy Tales"), the musicians evoked Schumann's atmospheric tales without aid of any specific — or at least not any identifiable — extra-musical content. Collins and Yusuf contributed enchanting ambience while Chung provided flowing and precise accompaniment. In the first movement, Collins and Yusuf traded melodies between them, and in the second, round robin-like, the group of three fused two-note phrases together, achieving one continuous statement. The lovely and languid third movement began noble and grew ardent. And the conclusion, lively and light, sent everyone home happy.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 13, 2024.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)