

ChamberFest Cleveland: “Sing Hallelujah!” (June 26)

by Daniel Hathaway



SING HALLELUJAH!

Sometimes the only thing that connects works in a concert is that they all appear on the same program page. That certainly characterized the mix of two Brahms songs, the premiere of a violin and piano work, a “repetitive music” classic for duo

pianists, and a well-known piano trio that were featured in ChamberFest Cleveland’s sold out program “Sing Hallelujah!” on June 26 in Mixon Hall.

Johannes Brahms was partial to works that explore the lower, more mellow range of voices and instruments, as represented here by a pair of songs. Throughout both *Gestillet Sehnsucht* and *Geistliches Wiegenlied*, mezzo-soprano Fleur Barron, violist Kim Kashkashian, and pianist Amy Yang produced rich, expressive musical lines that projected beautifully into the hall. The “Sacred Crib Song” was especially endearing for quoting the well-known 14th-century Christmas song “Joseph lieber, Joseph mein,” a little joke referring to the work’s dedicatee, Joseph Joachim.

For something completely different, Itamar Zorman and Roman Rabinovich introduced Rabinovich’s new *Capriccio Errante for violin and piano*. Cast in five continuous movements, the work lives up to its intriguing title by offering lively, virtuosic music that constantly wanders while continuously evolving.

The *Capriccio* is teeming with such inventive musical ideas that it holds your attention by simply keeping you wondering what will happen next. One moment Rabinovich is playing inside the piano and the next, Zorman is echoing on the violin what we just heard. The violin sometimes sings in its high register, and sometimes imitates complicated rhythmic figures introduced by the piano.

As the piece unfolds, the two players toss very fast passages back and forth creating a humorous colloquy between them, driving rhythms forward to during the fourth

movement Burlesque. It's one of those rare pieces of music that on first hearing it, you wish it had lasted longer.

Coming as it did after the *Capriccio*, John Adams' *Hallelujah Junction* sounded curiously dated. One of the surviving artifacts of the so-called "minimalist" movement of the '90s, it generates musical interest through nervous melodic and rhythmic repetition, coupled with glacial harmonic movement, and in this case by a persistent "Hallelujah" motif cribbed from Handel's *Messiah*.

The piece requires a machine-like dedication from the performers, and Roman Rabinovich and Amy Tan, evenly matched and facing each other at two Steinways, played Adams' music tirelessly and with extra-human precision. If tendonitis wasn't inevitable, ice packs should have been waiting backstage.

But Amy Yang was game for more, joining violinist Diana Cohen and cellist Sterling Elliot in Felix Mendelssohn's attractive d-minor Piano Trio to close out the concert.

The trio's passionate phrasing, nuanced lines, and healthy-sounding tone was supported handsomely by Elliot's rich bass lines in the opening Molto allegro ed agitato. Yang's expressive opening in the Andante was mirrored by Cohen and Elliot, and the Scherzo was pure Mendelssohn — brisk and playful. In the final Allegro, the trio produced a grand sound whether playing forte or pianissimo. A nice way to wrap up an intriguing musical smorgasbord.

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