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Trio of local musicians launch Chamber Music Society's Season 77

By Kevin McLaughlin



The Cleveland Chamber Music Society opened its 77th season on Wednesday, September 9, to a large and lively house at the Cleveland Museum of Art's Gartner Auditorium.

The attractions were three distinguished Cleveland musicians — Cleveland Orchestra concertmaster Joel Link, principal horn Nathaniel Silberschlag, and pianist Dawoon Chung — and a program of works by Reinhold Glière, Gabriel Fauré, and Johannes Brahms.

Silberschlag and Chung began with four selections from Ukrainian-born Glière's Op. 35. Written in 1908, they appear curiously older, with little obvious Russian color. At times they sound as though they belong to an earlier Central European salon tradition — especially the old-world sway of the *Valse triste* and the broad, songful lines of the *Nocturne* and *Intermezzo*. The latter were written for horn, while the *Romance* and *Valse triste* began as clarinet pieces.

Silberschlag and Chung set a high standard early. The hornist played with a radiant, assured tone, saving his most powerful sound for the climax of the *Romance*, while Chung brought clarity and poignancy to the piano textures.

Fauré's 1875–76 *Violin Sonata No. 1*, well received from the start, was his breakthrough as a chamber-music composer. It is a sonata perhaps more readily admired than loved. Its emotions tend to stay behind a scrim, especially compared to Franck's *Violin Sonata* —

which kept coming to mind — or to some of Fauré's later chamber music. But its give-and-take has pleasures of its own.

Piano and violin met as equals, trading ideas and each pressing its case. Chung's opening solo arrived fully formed, as if it were the main event. Link answered in kind. And on they went.

In the Andante, Link's melody grew from a whisper to a full sound as Chung kept the pulse steady and firm. Quick exchanges brought out the wit of the scherzo. The finale was bright and animated.

Brahms's *Horn Trio in E-flat*, was the highlight. The composer wrote for the *Waldhorn*, or natural horn, though the valve horn was already widely used by 1865. Open and stopped notes change the instrument's color, and Brahms made those differences part of the interplay among horn, violin, and piano.

Silberschlag found some of that older palette on his modern instrument, shading notes with his bell hand and drawing out soft, dusky tones that still carried. It was an ideal horn sound.

In the opening Andante, Link and Silberschlag finished each other's phrases while Chung kept the music moving underneath. The Scherzo supplied a jolt of energy, driven by Chung's strong rhythms. In the Trio, violin and horn turned secretive before Chung took over the melody.

The *Adagio mesto* was the trio's emotional core. Long associated with Brahms's mother's death earlier that year, it carried grief and distance. Link and Silberschlag were restrained at first, with Chung casting a dark veil over the sound. A heartbeat rhythm throbbed in the piano, and the melodies moved in long, slow arcs, like a cortège.

Near the end came a striking turn to the major, a slow-motion portent of the finale and its folk-song theme, "Es soll sich ja keiner mit der Liebe abgeben" — "No one should have anything to do with love." At the climax, Silberschlag's high note had orchestral scale without losing its warmth.

All restraint was released in the finale. Horn calls recalled the instrument's roots, and when the folk-song idea returned in full, the three players passed it among themselves, relishing Brahms's sudden hemiolas and bursts of outdoor roughhousing.

Photo courtesy of Ron Werman

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