

## Aspen Music Festival review: Gypsy fun after Brahms enlivens the weekend

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The cellist David Finckel and his pianist wife Wu Han always deliver more than expected. For their recital Saturday evening in Harris Hall they chose two extraordinary partners in crime, the violinist Arnaud Sussmann and the violist Paul Neubauer, in early Beethoven and Brahms.

Wu Han's introductory remarks explained that Beethoven made his first splash in Vienna with his Opus 1 piano trios (piano, violin and cello) followed three years later with his Opus 9 string trios (violin, viola and cello). When Brahms hit Vienna in 1861, he opted for a piano quartet, topping it off with an extroverted rondo finale of gypsy inspiration, something he knew the Viennese would relish.

That last is what set off two memorable encore turns by Neubauer. Entering from the back of Harris Hall, he played his way down the aisle, weaving sinuous gypsy phrases, serenading Joan Harris (after whom the hall is named), all the while accompanied by the others onstage. The audience lapped it up, and well they should have. It was inspired jollity with soulful music-making.

The program opened with Beethoven's string trio Op. 9 No. 1, a cheerful romp that includes some finger-busting piano work, which Wu Han dispatched with élan, attention to dynamics and unity of pace and tempo. Sussman and violist Neubauer fit smoothly with Finckel. Sussman took the lead with assurance and presence, as he did throughout the proceedings, and Neubauer was with them, nuance for nuance.

Wu Han delivered the tricky passages with flair and precision in the Piano Trio Op. 1 No. 2 that followed. Finckel was the linchpin, his cello line passing the melodic material back and forth, his face reflecting how each passage bounced among the musicians. If the finale turned into a headlong race to the finish line, they all arrived together, breathlessly. All three pieces ended with the tempo marking of presto, the fastest.

The Brahms quartet took off with stolid unity, veered into a sweet interlude and, as the material developed, reflected a welcome sense of discovery. The soft, muted strings brought a glow to the gently flowing Intermezzo before dissolving into an almost devotional-sounding Andante. Then came the finale, and an encore that ended an exciting performance on high notes when Neubauer turned the 500-seat hall into his personal gypsy cabaret—on viola.