

Palm Beach Daily News

Feb 14, 2019

Review: Lincoln Center music-makers stellar at Four Arts in Palm Beach

By Kevin Wilt / Special to the Daily News

Wu Han, David Finckel, and other members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center continued their weeklong Beyer Artists-in-Residence program at The Society of the Four Arts on Wednesday night. The first concert in the series traced the evolution of the Classical style into the Romantic via the cello sonata, while the second concert followed a parallel path with larger string ensembles.

In taking notes during this performance, words like “full-bodied” or “bold” kept magically showing up. This concert was not like coffee, but rather good scotch. It was refined, but not delicate. Unlike with so many performers, this music was not treated with white gloves, as if it was too fragile to play with. The opening salvo was Ludwig van Beethoven’s String Trio in G major (Op. 9, No. 1), with cellist Finckel being joined by violinist Arnaud Sussman and violist Paul Neubauer.

From the outset, all three matched a strong tone, with ends of phrases and gestures ringing in the hall. These were musicians playing music in the literal sense of the word: they were playing and teasing with each other, almost egging one another on to a bigger, more energetic sound. The second movement was robust, based on a descending scale motive, where the third was heavy, but quick. The finale burst the seams, with all three players cutting loose, clearly having a lot of fun as they pushed their musical engine to higher and higher RPMs.

Next, pianist Wu Han joined Neubauer in Franz Schubert’s *Arpeggione* Sonata (in A minor, D. 821), here in a version for viola and piano. The piece opens with one of the more famous melodies in classical music, here with piano balanced perfectly under the lyrical viola. The second movement had a delicate lullaby quality, with Neubauer reaching to an intensely quiet sound, pulling the audience all the way up on stage. That quiet led to an abrupt launch into the third movement, which had more acrobatic viola playing than the first two, but not quite as much dramatic tension.

The final work was the behemoth Piano Quartet No. 1 (in G minor, Op. 25) by Johannes Brahms. All four players belted out strong unisons, combining the robust sound established in the Beethoven with Wu Han’s gorgeous tone. The second movement was light, racing, and driven with a constant pulse. The third was lush with harmonies in the strings, and a bold, dramatic narrative. The piano, capable of overpowering most instruments, had to put up a fight with the massive sound coming from the strings. Compared to the heaviness of the third movement, the fourth was fun and games, reengaging some of the playfulness heard in the Beethoven.

Wu Han described the piece as a “barn burner,” and she was not wrong.