

## Letter V

### THE VIRGINIA CLASSICAL MUSIC BLOG

## Review: Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Five members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center worked and played their way into an ensemble as they performed in the season-opener of Virginia Commonwealth University's Rennolds Chamber Concerts series.

The first two pieces on the program were duos: Beethoven's Variations on "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen" ("With men who feel love") from Mozart's opera "The Magic Flute," played by cellist Keith Robinson and pianist Orion Weiss, and Schubert's "Arpeggione" Sonata in A minor, played by violist Paul Neubauer with Weiss.

Then, violinist Paul Huang and double-bassist Xavier Foley joined Weiss in Camillo Sivori's adaptation of Giovanni Bottesini's "Gran duo concertante," originally for two double-basses and piano. Finally, Orion and the four fiddlers played Schubert's "Trout" Quintet in A major.

Besides being a nice progression from duos to trio to quintet, this also was one of the rare chamber programs that showcased individual as well as group virtuosity. Both kinds proved equally rewarding.

The "Trout" Quintet, so named because the fourth of its five movements is a set of variations on the Schubert song of that name ("Die Forelle"), received a warm-toned, affectionate reading that made ample room for cameos from each of the musicians and for sympathetic interplay among them – effectively parlaying the individual strengths they had displayed in earlier selections into the group effort.

I was reminded of the "super-sessions" once in vogue among pop and rock musicians, only those star collectives rarely jelled. These stellar players made a richly expressive and consistently stylish sum of their parts. (Schubert, of course, deserves a big share of the credit.)

On the smaller scale, the duo by Bottesini, who was known as the "Paganini of the bass," by way of Sivori, the only violinist who could claim Paganini as his teacher, presented violinist Huang and double-bassist Foley with a succession of ever-wilder challenges to fiddle virtuosity, which they met with seeming spontaneity and infectious merriment.

The "Arpeggione" Sonata, which Schubert wrote for a short-lived hybrid of cello and guitar, nowadays generally played by cellists, sounded in Neubauer's hands as if it were written for the viola. His tonal warmth matched that of a cello; his phrasing was more nuanced and his articulation more clear than most cellists could manage.

Robinson, cellist of the Miami String Quartet as well as a Chamber Music Society member, accentuated the contrast of his instrument's bass-baritone voice with that of the piano in the Beethoven variations, to especially fine effect in the lyrical penultimate variation of the set.

Weiss, heard here on several occasions as a solo pianist, had few solo moments in this program, but showed himself to be an attentive partner in and interpretive enhancer of each selection. His contributions were most notable in the Schubert works, where the piano serves as both foundation and subtle leader of the music.

Both the Bottesini-Sivori duo and the "Trout" Quintet boast false climaxes, inviting premature applause. The VCU audience batted 0-for-2, but this was a concert that deserved a couple of extra ovations.

**By Clarke Bustard**