

Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players

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SEEN AND HEARD INTERNATIONAL CONCERT REVIEW

Review of Jupiter Concert May 16, 2011

Schoenberg Does a Strauss Waltz, Strauss Writes an Adagio for Strings, Brahms Joins in a Gypsy Dance

by Stan Metzger ~ Seen and Heard International ~ May 24, 2011

Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players: Adam Neiman (piano), Anton Barakhovsky (violin), Lisa Shihoten (violin), Paul Neubauer (viola), Maurycy Banaszek (viola), Suren Bagratuni (cello), David Requiro (cello), Kurt Muroki (double bass), Barry Crawford (flute), Vadim Lando (clarinet). Good Shepherd Church, New York City.

Johann Strauss II ~ *Emperor Waltz* (transcribed by Arnold Schoenberg for piano, string quartet, flute and clarinet)

Richard Strauss ~ *Metamorphosen* (reconstructed by Rudolf Leopold for 2 violins, 2 violas, 2 celli and double bass from a sketch for string septet found in 1990)

Brahms ~ Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 25

This concert was another fine performance of unusual repertory, brilliantly played by little-known musicians. The last of a series of twenty inventive programs that started in September 2010, this concert was planned to end on a high note and it didn't disappoint.

The program opened with a Schoenberg transcription of a work by a composer who could be considered his exact opposite, Johann Strauss II. Schoenberg himself said the following:

"I don't see why when other people are entertained I too should not sometimes be entertained.... It would be hypocritical of me to conceal the fact that I occasionally step down from my pedestal and enjoy light music. "

Schoenberg also implied that only light music that had some depth was worth bothering about. He seemed to have found something of interest in the "Emperor Waltz," enough to make the effort to shrink a whole orchestral score into a work for six players. The end result is much more serious, and more amusing, than the original. These differences between the original and the

transcription are subtle and mostly done "behind the scene": changes in harmony, added counterpoint and instrumental color. This transcription emphasizes the bass instruments and transcribes some of the instrumentation to the flute, clarinet and piano. The result is a work that sounds as if it were written for an accordion or street band with its inebriated oom-pah-pah beat. The choice of solo instruments to replace a full orchestra section gives the work a fresh touch. The instrumentalists played the piece to the hilt, putting it through all of Strauss-Schoenberg's musical peregrinations. They highlighted all the facets of the score that made the original such a popular work.

We are in a whole new world with Strauss's *Metamorphosen* in a transcription by Rudolf Leopold. This is less a transcription than a reduction of players from twenty-three strings to six, and it results in a more intimate reading of a monumental work. Strauss originally referred to this piece as an "Adagio for about 11 strings," and indeed it has much in common with Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* which came ten years earlier. They both are funereal in nature, bent on creating a somber musical environment. The *Metamorphosen* though reaches back towards Wagner and the Schoenberg of *Verklärte Nacht* and is considerably more difficult than Barber's work. It's easy to catch on to Barber's poignant work with an opening main theme that hits you in the face and doesn't do much else after that. Strauss's goes on for twice as long, through varied key modulations, producing a deeper harmonic depth. It leads one through a dark landscape with only a few hopeful moments. **I was mesmerized from start to finish**, caught up in its passionate despair. This is not the Strauss who slowly leads you to the rapturous climaxes of his popular tone poems; to understand it the audience has to go with its sorrowful flow. The players maintained the work's expressive and mournful mood to its bitter end.

A much more upbeat work concluded the program and the season: Brahms's Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor Op. 25. This is perhaps Brahms's most successful work, at least of his middle period, filled with delightful themes. (Interestingly, Schoenberg transcribed this piece for full orchestra.) The first movement alone has four astoundingly beautiful themes: the opening piano motif taken up immediately by the cello, the lyrical second played by the cello, the soaring third by the violin and viola and the rollicking fourth by the players in unison. This last theme, in the recapitulation, changes surprisingly from a jaunty to a melancholy one, modulating to the minor key as the movement ends on a quiet note. The second movement is a speedy Intermezzo with even an even speedier Trio section marked *Animato*. After a return to the original tempo, the movement ends with a flourish in the piano, again ending softly in a *pp*.

The Andante Brio opens with a classic Brahms-style theme, similar in spirit to the *Academic Festival Overture*. As the work's slow movement, it doesn't provide much peace, with stormy chords from the piano filling its central section. It seems that Brahms here, as in his first piano concerto, is writing the symphony he didn't feel that he was yet capable of writing.

The final movement is the famous Rondo alla Zingarese with its rustic country dance rhythms and poignant middle section. The piano has a workout that requires tremendous dexterity. As would be typical of this country-band music, the piece builds up to a frenzy with Brahms concluding this masterpiece with the designation *Molto Presto*.

The work, rife with challenges on all levels, as well as the two preceding pieces, was handled admirably by all involved. **The entire series presented exceptional performances of unusual repertory that deserves to be better known.**

Note: Even though I could not see the pianist Adam Neiman play, I was aware of the fact that there wasn't a page turner present, and he didn't seem to be turning pages himself. An announcement was made that he was using an iPad 2. After the concert we spoke briefly, and he said that he was reading the score from the iPad using an app that costs \$5. The iPad connected wirelessly to two remote pedals near the piano's pedals (which cost an additional \$110).

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