

Weiss-Kaplan-Stumpf Trio

"...a top-drawer ensemble... strong, engaging and simply superb."

Chamber trio's performance a 'superb pleasure'

Virginia Gazette: John Shulson

Once again, the Chamber Music Society of Williamsburg brought us a top drawer ensemble, this time with the Weiss Kaplan Stumpf Trio, heard Tuesday in the Williamsburg Library Theatre by a packed house. The group, formed in 2001, has been in its current configuration since 2014, consisting of pianist Yael Weiss, violinist Mark Kaplan and cellist Peter Stumpf. While all three have or have had affiliation with Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, they have had individually distinctive careers internationally with significant and acclaimed orchestras, ensembles and music festivals.

While the WKS Trio is a serious proponent of new and emerging music, the program for this Williamsburg event was strictly conventional — exquisite but not out of the ordinary: Faure's Piano Trio in D minor, Mendelssohn's Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor and Schubert's Trio No. 1 in B-flat major.

Faure's general acceptance as a composer of sweet sounds, a kind and gentle soul, were evident in his Piano Trio. His only composition for piano trio, its three movements are largely filled with lyricism and embracing sounds that shimmer and delight in the spirit of Romanticism. However, composed toward the end of his life when deaf or at said doorstep, it also illustrates a more mature compositional style, one that flirts with 20th century influences. It also explores degrees of restlessness and melancholy, such as heard in the searing and passionate unison singing between the violin and cello in the Andantino. It was a moment of musical magic.

The Mendelssohn is a perfect reflection of his Romantic period style. It is lush, melodic and sweeping in scope. Considered one of his most popular chamber works, along with his sublime Octet, the Trio is filled with passion and outright

emotion. Starting with the blend of emotional turbulence and delicacy of theme in the Allegro through the quiet, song-like quality of the deeply emotional Andante and the frenetically frisky Scherzo, so typical of Mendelssohn, to the closing bold and fiery finale with its reference to a 16th century chorale in the piano, the work was an encompassing listening experience. There was substantial, sweeping virtuoso piano playing here which Weiss performed with dazzling determination — so much so that, at times in the first movement, her output almost overwhelmed the fine efforts of her cohorts.

Piano virtuoso playing was also evident in the Schubert. If not known by number, the very first bars of the piece were enough to send instant messages of recognition. It is, unquestionably, one of the most familiar of piano trio works ever written and a mainstay of classical radio station broadcasts and live chamber music programs. Its brilliant performance fully captured the work's elegance, charm, delicacy and power.

The jaunty opening Allegro was given an appropriately uplifting reading. As for the gorgeous Andante, WKS handled its flowing lines of rich, velvet-like melody with exquisite care that was sheer bliss. The Scherzo, like that of Mendelssohn, was light, effervescent and happy. The Finale's Rondo was appropriately energetic and playful, as was the group's reading strong, engaging and simply superb.

The WKS is an extremely fine ensemble of equally talented musicians whose insightful interpretations, fully coordinated playing, satisfyingly blended sound and concern for musical nuance made this latest Chamber Music Society happening a superb pleasure.

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