

Weiss Kaplan Stumpf Trio showcase individual expertise while shining as one

KENNETH DELONG, CALGARY HERALD

Making its Calgary debut, the Weiss Kaplan Stumpf Trio presented a program of piano trio classics in the continuing Calgary Pro Musica series, a concert of the highest quality that clearly thrilled the large audience.

The trio will probably not win an Academy Award for the catchiest title for a piano trio, but, if there were such an award, they would certainly win one for the most moving performance of a major chamber work.

While the entire concert was beautifully and sensitively performed, one might single out the performance of Schubert's great B-flat piano trio as particularly special. A sprawling work with a very long first movement, it needs players that fully understand Schubert's lyrical and dramatic musical language, and especially his treatment of harmony and melodic characterization.

It was in these aspects of performance, in a work where the competition is the fiercest, that the trio showed just how good they are. Everywhere the inner spirit of Schubert's exquisite melodies and his magical harmonic changes were richly grasped and projected with utter clarity.

Key to this was the sensitive playing by Yael Weiss at the piano. Playing the Rosza Centre's Steinway, generally not as warm an instrument as the hall's Bechstein, she nevertheless coaxed beautiful sounds from the instrument, overcoming its generally weak top register. And her brilliance in the rapid passagework showed the abilities of a totally professional pianist, with a complete command of the instrument.

I especially enjoyed Mark Kaplan's extremely precise, delicate playing in the violin part, his

sweetness of his tone and unforced projection everywhere a delight, but particularly so in the Schubert trio. And there was strength and warmth in Peter Stumpf's cello playing, even the accompanying passages given personality and character.

So perhaps this is the right title for the group: it was not just in the ensemble element but the individual contributions of the performers that raised this performance far above the quotidian.

The first half featured a warmly lyrical account of Faure's late Piano Trio in D minor, the expressive middle movement performed to perfection. As with much of Faure, it is the attention to the texture that makes for success and, in this, the inherent warmth of the playing was a tremendous asset. But beautiful, too, was the characterization of the final movement.

Beethoven's Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 1, No. 3, is one of the composer's deservedly most popular chamber works, and it is just the kind of music where the special qualities of this ensemble shine. This was not a period instrument style of performance, but rather a modern, full-blooded account of the music. While there was poetry in the slow playing, there was also a full projection of the humour and good spirits that inform this work. This was especially the case in the final movement, again a particularly happy moment in an otherwise excellent performance.

One hopes that on their next appearance — and they simply must come again — they will program a trio by Brahms, a taste of which was heard in the raptly delivered encore.

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