

The Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio and guest artists

Perform a Mendelssohn Sonata, a Quartet, and a Sextet

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Trio, friends mark 200th birthday of Mendelssohn

By Peter Jacobi
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If Sunday afternoon's concert by the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio and friends had consisted of only the Adagio, the third movement of Mendelssohn's Sonata in D Major for Cello and Piano, Opus 58, this listener would have been satisfied and gone home feeling fortunate.

The music here features a radiant, chorale-like melody that originates in the piano, crosses over to the cello, and ends with the two instruments in union. Yael Weiss set those piano tones ringing and reverberating. Clancy Newman drew gorgeous, vibrant pulsations from his cello. By themselves and together, they shaped a thing of beauty. Hearing it made me smile and sigh contentedly.

I silently thanked the players and Felix Mendelssohn, the afternoon's composer-in-the-spotlight. The concert, in Recital Hall, was designed as a local celebration of his 200th birthday, a historical fact being artistically commemorated with events all around the musical world. Weiss, Newman, and trio colleague Mark Kaplan — along with violinist Sarah Kapustin, violists Atar Arad and Zoe Martin-Doike, and double bassist Peter Lloyd — paid their respects by performing three of this 19th century master's chamber works.

The fare included, of course, the other three movements of the Opus 58 Sonata plus the Quartet Number 2 in A Minor, Opus 13, and the D Major Sextet for Piano and Strings, Opus 110. And though that previously discussed Adagio would have been enough for me, it fortunately came with a fuller and most nourishing banquet.

The emotion-charged A Minor Quartet benefited from a well-adjusted, comely and ardent reading involving violinists Kaplan and Kapustin, violist Arad, and cellist Newman. Mendelssohn was all of 18 when he completed the score, reportedly inspired both by an infatuation for a young lady and Beethoven's late quartets.

The young lady caused the composer to write a song based on a friend's poem, one which begins, "Is it true that you are always waiting for me in the arbored walk?" The theme of that song became the kernel of the quartet. Beethoven's music, which Mendelssohn had recently heard, sparked his desire to write the piece and to experiment with harmonic and fugal techniques his idol had employed. The maturity in the writing belies Mendelssohn's age and yet also benefits from the energy of youth, which Sunday's performers exploited to the fullest.

Though the high opus number, 110, suggests otherwise, the D Major Sextet, which closed the program, actually predates the Opus 13 Quartet. The precocious Mendelssohn was 15 when he wrote it. Scored for one violin (Kaplan), two violas (Arad, Martin-Doike), cello (Newman), double bass (Lloyd), and piano (Weiss), it offers rich sonorities and, as in the sonata and quartet, a wide range of developments, from agitated to calm, from rhapsodic to delicately fleeting. The piece was treated to an animated and agile reading, worthy of a celebratory concert.

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