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Voice Lessons
Kyle Engler
November 16th 2014

Concert Report

“Stirring Alto Voices”

On Monday, November 13th 2014, I attended a concert held at 7:00 pm in the McDaniel Lounge. The concert was presented by David Duree on clarinet, Alice Tung on viola, and Rachel Andrews on piano. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, the selections were lovely, and I very much enjoyed the performances. The first piece was a Brahms sonata that was written for either the viola or clarinet, with piano accompaniment. Mrs. Tung played the first movement, and Mr. Duree the second.

What stood out to me the most about this piece was the melody. It was lyrical and flowing, and very clearly distinguishable from the accompaniment. Brahms cleverly exploited the low range of the viola to bring out this melody, creating beautiful harmonies between the two parts. That being said, there were plenty of little moments when the piano and viola passed motives back and forth, showcasing not only the balance between the two instruments, but the technical abilities of the musicians as well. I also observed that Mrs. Andrews’ son did an excellent job turning pages.

The only complaint I would have about this piece is that I felt that while beautiful, the viola line could have been more expressive. I felt underwhelmed in places, and given the composer, I expected a more dramatic emotional performance, no matter how technically good the playing.

On that note, I was rather more enamoured with Mr. Duree’s interpretation of the *andante con moto*, *allegro*, and *piu tranquillo*. In fact, Mr. Duree was so physically expressive that I was a little concerned for him at first, on account of how red his face became when he began to play. I did find myself amused by the amount of piano accompaniment that took on a life of its own, in the typical Brahmsian manner. Another thing that made me chuckle were the stand lights. The way they were arranged on the stand made them look like insect antennae. I really liked Mr. Duree’s tone. It was very full, yet light, perfectly complimenting the medium paced melody. The music was additionally quite consonant after the romantic style. Brahms however kept the music interesting in its rhythmic activities, setting three against four, followed by beautiful descending scales in both instruments.

The next piece was by a woman composer named Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979). Mrs. Tung shared some information about Clarke, including an anecdote about a competition Clarke once entered, with one piece under a man’s name. Her pieces were largely dismissed, but “Anthony Trent’s” piece was highly acclaimed, in keeping with the attitude towards women composers during that era.

The piece that was played by Mr. Duree and Mrs. Tung was very dissonant in comparison to the Brahms, but was aptly suited to the time period in which it was written. According to the

musicians, they had fourteen pages worth of music to play, and they did an admirable job going from page to page without breaking their stride. Slow and haunting, the harmony between the viola and clarinet in the *Andante semplice* was written in such a way that at times, the individual timbres blended perfectly together to sound like one unique instrument, especially in the upper registers of the instruments. The melody was quite interesting as well, being based around a motive that was varied in different ways.

The third movement, *Poco Lento*, had a beautiful melody that centered around a single note, and was started by the viola. Again, this piece had interesting harmonies, and lots of dissonance. The images the music gave me were: that of walking through an old, creaky country house at night, and: a fairy ring that lies just yonder over the hill. Every now and then, lilting consonant harmonies would interject, made all the more lovely by the surrounding dissonances. The viola had to make some purposefully squeaky sounds, which made for some very neat effects.

I very much enjoyed the “Jamaica Rumba,” which was a solo viola piece with piano accompaniment. Based on a Jamaican folk song called “Mango Walk,” it had a cool syncopated rhythm and was very short, which helped break up the feeling of length generated by the first two works. The next two pieces were also quite short as well. The last piece, *Clarinet Polka*, was an accordion and clarinet piece, with Mrs. Tung playing the accordion. I loved the folksy sound, and recognized the piece immediately – as I do many accordion pieces, for some unfathomable reason. What was most interesting to me is that in the B section, Mr. Duree stopped and they both restarted the part. I was rather surprised, as I had thought doing so (and admitting what one has done wrong) was anathema when playing live, but I suppose it was necessary – one of those unavoidable things that happens in performance.

My favourite piece of the evening was the penultimate one, a solo clarinet piece accompanied by piano. It was called *Cityscape* by Keith Ramon Cole, and the feeling it evoked was that of the inner city at night, the sleazy nightlife, the flickering lights; that gumshoe, Dick Tracy, film noir sort of feeling. That was due in part to the slow, bluesy mood, accented by sections of ascending triplets and grace notes, and the strong ostinato in the piano. Mr. Duree also threw in some hints of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, which was quite delightful.

Overall, I had wonderful time at the concert. I had not heard that particular combination of instruments before, and was introduced to new literature, as well becoming reacquainted with pieces I had long forgotten. The concert lasted just about an hour, which was a perfect amount of time absorb all the music, and I made sure afterward to tell the musicians how much I enjoyed their performances. It is always a pleasure to hear faculty play, as there is a real sense of love for the music, and I always learn something new at the faculty and guest concerts.