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Review: KLR Trio at Kennedy Center Terrace Theater

By Stephen Brookes, April 30, 2013

“The KLR players are superstars of the chamber music world, and from the first notes of the evening it was clear why. Opening with Beethoven’s not-too-serious Piano Trio in B-Flat Major, Op. 11 — an entertaining work whose main claim to fame is its variations on a popular song of the time — the trio gave it a rich and comfortably unbuttoned reading... As for Brahms’s Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, Op. 8, which closed the program, there is only one thing to say: If you missed this performance, you should regret it bitterly for the rest of your life... it would be hard to imagine a more passionate, perfectly controlled and absolutely radiant reading than it received from the KLR players.”

It’s tough being a composer in the 21st century. How do you satisfy those omnivorous modern ears out there, those audiences at home with everything from Monteverdi to Willie Nelson to Tuvan throat-singing? Ask Stanley Silverman. He’s nothing if not wide-ranging — the guy once brought Pierre Boulez to a party thrown by Paul Simon. The composer’s wildly eclectic Piano Trio No. 2 was the centerpiece of a concert at the Kennedy Center’s Terrace Theater on Monday night by the illustrious Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio.

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But the Beethoven was merely a prelude to Silverman’s work, which received its Washington premiere. The Piano Trio No. 2, “Reveille,” caroms freely among styles: A spiky modernist opening softens into an ethereal melody, which warps into a sensuous Cuban Guajira, which transforms into a classical fugue while Renaissance dances drift hither and yon, until the whole thing bursts into an anything-goes riff on Paul Simon’s “You Can Call Me Al.” It’s sort of a hot mess — Silverman himself says the piece “is not intended to ‘hang together’ any more than life itself,” and, fair enough, it doesn’t. **But imaginative writing, a complete lack of stuffiness and a hugely enthusiastic reading by the KLR players (for whom it was written) made up for the kitchen-sink feeling, and it proved to be an engaging — if sometimes head-scratching — listen.**

As for Brahms’s Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, Op. 8, which closed the program, there is only one thing to say: If you missed this performance, you should regret it bitterly for the rest of your life. It’s a ravishing work, an epic masterpiece by the young and unfathomably mature Brahms (he was 20 when he wrote it), and **it would be hard to imagine a more passionate, perfectly controlled and absolutely radiant reading than it received from the KLR players.**