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Review: KLR Trio at Kent Blossom Series as Kulas Visiting Artists

By Daniel Hathaway, August 1, 2019

The Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson trio, this season's Kulas Visiting Artists, brought the Kent Blossom Music Festival faculty series to a memorable conclusion on Wednesday evening, July 31 in Ludwig Recital Hall on the Kent State campus. This group qualifies as a legacy ensemble — they've played together since Jimmy Carter's inauguration in 1977 — but they continue to perform with fire and authority. Playing to a large crowd on Wednesday, they no doubt inspired KBMF students as much as they delighted the general public.

Pianist Joseph Kalichstein, violinist Jaime Laredo, and cellist Sharon Robinson moved from recent to middle-aged to old music, beginning with André Previn's *Trio No. 2*, commissioned by Music Accord for the group and premiered in 2012. They revived the piece to mark the composer's death in 2019.

Like Leonard Bernstein, Previn moved easily among musical genres, and his Second Piano Trio closely juxtaposes lyricism with spiky dissonance, and jazzy gestures with academic classicism — polarities represented in the first movement dialogues between piano and strings. The players were singled out in the slow movement, where Robinson's lyrical cello solo was taken over by Kalichstein, then by Laredo. A jumpy, nervous scherzo concludes the piece, its final gesture an amusing crash chord in the piano answered by a plunk from the strings.

The Trio also recently revived Ravel's A-minor Piano Trio, written just over a century ago. The gently syncopated opening movement soon built to a tremendous climax — these players can fill a hall with robust tone — before subsiding into clouds of subtle color.

The dancy second movement "Pantoum" (it takes its name from a Malaysian poetical form) was marked by a stunning upward-reaching crescendo. Kalichstein initiated the inexorable third-movement "Passacaille" with a portentous statement of the theme taken over robustly by Robinson and eventually echoed in a high-pitched, muted episode by the strings. The finale was triumphal, concluding in a controlled frenzy of notes.

To end the evening, the three musicians proved that they can read each other's minds at this point in their career by turning in a fabulous performance of Mendelssohn's D-Minor Trio. A mello solo by Robinson and a well-articulated tutti launched the first movement. The short second movement alternated between Mendelssohn's signature scherzotic lightness and stronger textures, producing an audible murmur of delight at the end. The Trio made fine changes of mood and color in the finale, finishing the work in a blaze of glory.

Responding to a strong ovation, the KLR Trio aptly offered a seasonal encore: Ari Stein's lovely arrangement of *Summertime*.

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