

theWholeNote

Classical and Beyond: Three Piano Masters

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Seen and Heard: April 8 at Koerner Hall, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Centre gave one of the most satisfying concerts of the season. The program was comprised of music written within a 35-year span of the mid-19th century: Mahler's youthful Piano Quartet Movement in A Minor, Schumann's Piano Quartet in E-flat Major Op.47 and Brahms' Piano Quartet No.1 in G Minor Op.25. Co-directors of the Society (and married to each other), pianist Wu Han and cellist David Finckel (who spent 34 years as a member of the Emerson String Quartet) were joined by violist Paul Neubauer (formerly principal violist of the New York Philharmonic) and British virtuoso violinist Daniel Hope.

Seating was fairly close with the violin and viola crowded together just beside the keyboard. The intimacy carried over into the performance which seemed the ultimate in musical sophistication. Hope sang eternal in the gem of beauty composed by the 16-year-old Mahler. Exquisite string playing throughout was finely supported by Wu's unruffled piano; impeccable ensemble playing with great expressiveness that was never showy or gauche.

The piano was more of a factor in the Schumann, its joyful first movement anchored by Finckel's sublime cello. The mad dance of the Scherzo was led by the cello with the piano particularly sensitive in the many quick and delicate staccato passages that had to be navigated. The Andante cantabile which followed is one of Schumann's most beautiful creations; a real treat. The Brahms was thick with melody as various instrumental combinations came to the fore during the opening movement's development. A beautiful theme emerged from the ethos with great delicacy on the violin as the piece continued through to the Andante con moto, its violin and cello parts reminiscent of the composer's Double Concerto. The Gypsy tune at the centre of the Rondo alla Zingarese broadened out led by the piano to an exquisite duet between cello and viola before the violin picked up the tune, the DNA of which Brahms found (happily) impossible to shake. It was a night where the Romantic melodists reigned supreme.