

Mendelssohn Piano Trio Gives a Brilliant Performance at the Slovenian Embassy

The occasion, the presence and the performance of the Mendelsson Piano Trio at the Embassy of Slovenia Friday seemed to embody, almost like a beautiful echo, the essence and not a small part of the soul and traditions of the Embassy Series.

In the embassy hall, which seems often to be a perfect setting for serious listening, the trio—Peter Srotin, violin, Fiona Thompson, cello, and Ya-Ting Chang, piano—played what could easily be called truly classical expressions of classical music, which informed and forms the bedrock traditions of the Embassy Series.



Jerome Barry, Director Peter Srotin, violin Ya-Ting Chang, piano Fiona Thompson, cello.

The works in a genre that goes to the roots of classical music back to the 1700s, usually piano-centered, with two other instruments, the cello and violin in this case, reflected the highest technical and emotional possibilities of chamber music and ranged freely within the limits of the genre. In general, the three offerings—Haydn’s Piano Trio in D Major, Ernest Bloch’s “Three Nocturnes” and a remarkable composition by Bedřich Smetana—gave the Mendelsson Piano Trio an opportunity to display its gift for versatility and thrilling, electric effects of heart-

racing quality as a group, and singular virtuosity in their individual displays of bravado and heart-felt playing.

There was in these performances of works that were very different but connected technically in the loose requirements of the genre a quality of tradition verified but also sometimes singular displays of flight, —on eclectic and electric spurts of boundary defying musicality that challenged our imagination to run with the wind.

If the first two parts of the program seemed, if not subdued, light as well as formal, the Smetana (he was a prolific 19th-century Czech composer whose works included operas and who suffered profoundly tragic familil losses) was an eye-and-heart opener. The work , in its Moderato, Allegro and Presto aspects, was like a shape-shifter, it contained what one call audible mysteries in Ms. Chang's powerful piano effects, in Srotin's wizardly, swirling violin playing and Ms. Thompson's grounded, authoritative work with the cello.



Former Congressman Don Bonker Ian Portnoy, Board Chair Jerome Barry

But there was a little more to it than that: the Smetana's music had the capacity to surprise, it seemed sometimes like a runaway train of music not heard before,

or at least, more specifically not felt before. You could sense, in many moments, a keen and intent listening in the audience, which made itself felt even more in the work of the players.

The works expressed a certain kind of European classicism from different periods and places—Haydn is after all Haydn, part of the beginning of German greatness, and Bloch's nocturnes were written in 1924, they reflected in their ability to move at many speeds from dark to light, the romanticism of the preceding century.

Smetana's work—albeit not a lengthy tome—struck me as akin to the great 19th century novels from England to Russia and France, the music was played like a giant epic poem and held within it worlds of personal loss and gigantic memories.

There was a sensibility at work that leap-frogged geographical and political history, the world of boundaries and treaties, and returned straight to the universal and personal that is the essence of music and art.

The occasion seemed that way, too. We were, after all, in an embassy of a country renewed, which was once one of the republics constituting Yugoslavia (which as a nation is gone), and we were listening to the music of a 19th-century Czech composer as well as a German giant. The musicians themselves are representative of art and music as having borderless geography—Peter Srotin was born in the Ukraine, which is now the center of so much tense turmoil, he is married to Ya-Ting Chang who is from Taiwan, while Fiona Thompson is from England.

In troubled times, we become acutely aware of the problems of nations—music, on the other hand, and experience such the concert at the Embassy of Slovenia remind us that problems can be, if not solved entirely, soothed like a famous bridge over troubled waters.

By Gary Tischler