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Three soloists at home in chamber music



By Jeremy Eichler | GLOBE STAFF FEBRUARY 29, 2016

Top-tier soloists rarely carve out much time for chamber music, and when they do, veteran listeners know to be forewarned. In fact, few concert-going experiences can be more dispiriting than watching an ad-hoc ensemble of celebrity soloists swan in, sell out a hall based on their individual reputations, and then proceed to make a hash out of the more subtle and hardwon musical values upheld by stalwart professional groups night after night.

Happily, the three players gathered on Saturday night as the Tetzlaff Trio do not fit this mold. It's true that both violinist Christian Tetzlaff and pianist Lars Vogt enjoy distinguished solo careers and appear frequently with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. But both men also care deeply about chamber music. Tetzlaff sometimes tours as part of a string quartet, and Vogt, for his part, directs a highly regarded summer chamber music festival in the German village of Heimbach. The cellist in the Tetzlaff Trio — and the Tetzlaff Quartet — is Tanja Tetzlaff (Christian's sister), who also appears frequently as a soloist but clearly grew up in a home where collaborative music-making was deeply valued. Chamber music, in short, is not an occasional indulgence for these players but an essential component of their musical lives.

This was apparent consistently throughout Friday's richly satisfying evening of piano trios, beginning with Schumann's F-Major Trio (Op. 80), here given an alert account that had no shortage of heat yet still avoided sentimentality. Interestingly, Christian Tetzlaff tends to play Romantic works with a wider sound palette than many violinists, eschewing the goal of tonal prettiness for its own sake. ("The listener loses the ear for the most beautiful sounds if they've been used for arbitrary, non-important things," he once explained.) In keeping with this notion, his Schumann embraced extremes of emotion with a lean and at times almost expressionistic directness. Tanja Tetzlaff played with a full and well-grounded sound, meeting him at every turn. And Vogt, who often performs duo recitals with Christian Tetzlaff, was a consistently

nimble presence, his pianism fleet and pointed.

Likewise in Dvorak's "Dumky" Trio, in which the group went still further to bring out the music's earthy folk flavors and its rhapsodic intensity over the course of a characterful and spontaneous reading.

The ensemble was wise to place Brahms's glowing B-Major Trio (Op. 8) after intermission, as this much-loved work is hard to follow with anything else. On Saturday its initial bars opened up like a meadow as the three players passed around that cresting happy-sad melody which, in its combination of wistful beauty and inner radiance, could only come from the pen of Brahms. The ovation at the work's conclusion was swift and heartfelt, and it earned the audience more Dvorak as an encore. Overall, it was a pleasure to hear both the ease of rapport among these three soloists, and in this core chamber music literature, just how much they had to say.