

# ZUILL BAILEY

## CELLO

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FROM:

## THE NAPA VALLEY REGISTER

Napa audience relished chamber music option

By L. PIERCE CARSON

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**“The program began with Brahms’ third piano quartet, with previously announced soloists **Zuill Bailey (cello) and Giora Schmidt (violin) teaming up with hotshot young pianist Orion Weiss and violist Carla Maria Rodrigues, first chair with the San Francisco Opera, for an exciting, first-rate reading.****

The first movement of this quartet is extremely dramatic. It runs the gamut of emotions of the Werther/Brahms character, from ardor to despair. In the third movement, we find a deeply moving love song, perhaps the composer expressing his affection for Clara Schumann. The finale is full of fury and hurt.

While quite rewarding for the audience, this work is very difficult for piano and strings. **The guest artists performed as if they’d been together for years. Thoughtful, sensitive playing in the slow movements, lively tempos in the allegros, exquisite musicianship as well as spontaneity all combined to make this performance a memorable one.**

An appreciative crowd (perhaps a half-full Lincoln Theater due to Super Bowl fans staying away) on Sunday afternoon was drawn into this consummate performance. The ensemble effort proved top-notch, with Weiss providing a seamless piano line for his stringed cohorts.

A Tchaikovsky ‘Souvenir’

While he spent three months in Florence in 1890 working on the opera, “The Queen of Spades,” Peter Tchaikovsky made mental notes about his surroundings and lifestyle. Back home, he spent about six weeks writing his last piece of chamber music, a chamber sextet titled “Souvenir de Florence.”

In traditional four movement form, Tchaikovsky’s “memory” of Florence was written for two violins, two cellos and two violas. Joining Schmidt, Bailey and Rodrigues for this performance were Napa Valley Symphony concertmaster Yasushi Ogura, cellist Robin Bonnell and violist Meg Tichener. **This was beautiful chamber music comradeship, as if they’d been playing together for a long time, certainly more than a couple of rehearsals.**

Working like a seasoned ensemble of old friends, our wine country sextet burst into a vigorous waltz with the first movement. The slow movement — offering another song in the “lonely heart” vein — had the violin introducing the romantic theme, then dueting with the cello. Here is where we got to experience the warm tone of Schmidt’s violin. His introductory long passage displayed mature, refined phrasing, and **the trading off with Bailey proved sublime.**

The finale, a Russian trepak, began innocently enough; but leave it to Tchaikovsky to tweak the trepak until it became a full-fledged fugue. Here, as well as during the preceding three movements, this group of exceptional musicians generated a lot of heat.

An ingratiating duo, **Bailey and Schmidt, teamed up as well to perform a transcription of a passacaglia from Handel’s “Suite No. 7 in G Minor for Harpsichord.” With this showpiece for a couple of virtuosos, the musicians appeared to be having as much fun in performance as the audience did listening.**

The chamber concert players received a well-deserved standing ovation at the conclusion of the performance, which the usually reserved Sunday afternoon audience doesn’t award in willy-nilly fashion.”

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*Colbert Artists Management*

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019

www.colbertartists.com ~ 212-757-0782