

A grand debut for new piano

By MARY KUNZ

News Classical Music Critic

Kleinhans Music Hall has a new piano — a spanking new Steinway 9-foot grand that was a gift from the Buffalo Chamber Music Society and the Cameron Baird Foundation. And beautiful it is.

That lucky Steinway could hardly have asked for a better coming-out party than it enjoyed Tuesday in the hands of the Paris Piano Trio.

In Europe, the Paris Piano Trio is known, simply and elegantly, as Les Musiciens. And there's a reason for that: They really are, as the cliché goes, musicians' musicians. These three players are subtle, stunningly accomplished and, faultlessly in synch. They have mastered all manner of technique.

No piece showed off the group's finesse quite as well as Shostakovich's Trio in E Minor, Op. 67. This work, awe-inspiring like a mountain, requires the string players to demonstrate every imaginable texture. Violinist Regis Pasquier and cellist Roland Pidoux carried it all off, from the daunting artificial harmonics (thin, whistling tones) on the cello that began the first movement to percussive col legno passages, in which the wood of the bow actually strikes the

REVIEW

Paris Piano Trio

Sponsored by the Buffalo Chamber Music Society.

Tuesday in Kleinhans Music Hall's Mary Seaton Room.

strings. (Someone in a front row reported that Pidoux was actually hitting the strings with the ivory tip of the bow. Interesting.)

The second movement of the Shostakovich was so full of joy and movement that a listener wanted to laugh out loud. The ending was shocking and delightful. It's hard to play this kind of music in synch and in tune. As it was, there was never a dull moment, but never a rough one, either. Cellist and violinist communicated perfectly.

And the piano? Pianist Jean-Claude Pennetier showed what the instrument could do, from the dark octave riffs in the deep bass to the percussive, single-note themes played against the pulse of the strings. This was perfect debut music for our shining new grand. It showed off the piano's strength and resonance and, especially, its youthful brilliance.

The other works on the program also called attention to the

piano's bright, strong sound. In the Andante of Haydn's Trio in C, Hob. XV:27, the solo piano introduction spotlighted the bell-like tones right in the middle of the keyboard. The virtuosic finale, so much like Beethoven, cast the piano in a starring role. Pennetier exhibited a light touch, fairly dancing over the keys. It was exciting and effervescent, like champagne.

At the end of the evening came Brahms Piano Trio No. 2 in C, Op. 87. This was deep, heartfelt Brahms, and showed us a side of Les Musiciens we hadn't seen before. Their interpretation was conservative and solid, but it had moments of real weight and passion. Pidoux, the cellist, especially seemed to pour out his heart.

The slow movement was the warmest part of the evening; it had a rich, intimate feel. And the trio of the Scherzo soared. This is music that, for my money, embodies the magic of Johannes Brahms: the noble, romantic melodies, the bittersweet harmonies, the passion, the warmth. The Paris Piano Trio played it for all it was worth.

No gimmickry, no fanfare — no encore, for that matter, either. Just impeccable, astonishing musicianship. Here's hoping the piano sees a lot of evenings like this one.

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