

Hermitage Piano Trio closes Chamber Music Society's Season

April 8, 2016

When the Hermitage Piano Trio last appeared on the Chamber Music Society's program in 2014, they mesmerized a packed house with playing of the highest order. When last here, Misha Keylin, violin, Sergey Antonov, cello, and Ilya Kazantsev, piano, impressed with their heightened sense of artistry and musical awareness, delivering a performance that defined collective passion for the music and each other's skills and sensitivities.

To have the trio back in the Williamsburg Library Theatre Tuesday was a treat, especially given the excellence displayed in the previous visit was still flourishing.

Starting with a sensitive and lyrically conceived performance of Schubert's "Notturmo in E-flat Major," it was evident this would be another blue ribbon event and a fine closing for the Chamber Music Society's season. The Schubert is exquisitely beautiful, with rich and inviting sustained melodic lines. The work's warmth and delicacy were fully embraced by the Hermitage.

Unlike many works by Brahms, his Piano Trio No. 3 in C Minor is not a thickly textured piece but rather one with somewhat tightly conceived melodic mission. Instead of frills, there are direct and succinct statements, as well as substantial amounts of drama, angst and unrest that are effectively offset by moments of gentle lyricism. The trio's delivery neatly conveyed the work's diverse power and softness in an exciting reading.

The evening's main event, Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio in A Minor, was a knockout moment. A work of somber qualities, its overriding sense of melancholy reflects his reaction to the death of his mentor, Nikolai Rubenstein. From its opening, plaintive lines in the cello, it exudes a despair that is palpable, passionate and unrelenting. It moves into a series of variations that, briefly, offer little rays of light and sweetness, before, at the end, suddenly falling back to the opening cello lament and descending into a lingering funereal mode, the full emotions of which were captured elegantly by the Hermitage.

The searing delivery given this most profound and poignant work was mighty and deserving of the hearty reception it received.