

Saturday, July 17, 2010

Notable 2 Brunch

Café Music for Violin, Cello, and Piano, op. 17 (1986)

Paul Schoenfield (b. 1947)

Allegro con fuoco

Andante moderato

Presto

Paul Schoenfield (b. 1947)—*Café Music for Violin, Cello, and Piano*, op. 17 (1986)

Paul Schoenfield is no Mozart. Mozart, after all, began writing music at age five, whereas Schoenfield was all of seven when his compositional career began. Like Mozart, however, Schoenfield absorbed musical influences from the full gamut of his wide-ranging experiences (he has lived in environments as diverse as Israel and Cleveland, Ohio). Again like the Viennese master, Schoenfield is a gifted pianist who has translated that skill into rich, challenging repertory; he has remarked that his music “is not the kind of music for relaxation, but the kind that makes people sweat; not only the performer, but the audience.” *Café Music*, commissioned by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, illustrates that nail-biting challenge: for instance, *can* the performers maintain the wild energy demanded by the closing “Presto”?

It is a nice opportunity when we can hear a composer speak for himself about his music, and Schoenfield says,

The idea to compose *Café Music* first came to me in 1985 after sitting in one night for the pianist at Murray's Restaurant in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Murray's employs a house trio which plays entertaining dinner music in a wide variety of styles. My intention was to write a kind of high-class dinner music -- music which could be played at a restaurant, but might also (just barely) find its way into a concert hall. The work draws on many of the types of music played by the trio at Murray's. For example, early 20th century American, Viennese, light classical, gypsy, and Broadway styles are all represented. A paraphrase of a beautiful Chassidic melody is incorporated in the second movement.”

The opening of that same second movement is a perfect illustration of Schoenfield's melding of styles. The lovely, upward piano arpeggio suggests that a work by Liszt or Rachmaninoff is about to commence—but almost before we realize it, a slow, bluesy promenade has begun, and the two string players soon add their languid, sinuous voices to the slinky texture. This slow movement is a welcome breather between the frenzied rhythmic twists of the “Allegro con fuoco” and the stormy impetuosity that drives the “Presto” clear up to its exhilarating finish.

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