

Sunday, July 18, 2010

Notable 3 Dinner

End-of-the-Line Cafe

Piano Trio No. 1 (2002)

Patrick Zimmerli (b. 1968)

Allegro

Semplice

Energico

Molto rubato—Largo—Presto

Patrick Zimmerli (b. 1968)—*Piano Trio No. 1* (2002)

When Mark Lehman, writing for *American Record Guide*, reviewed Patrick Zimmerli's piano trios, he observed that the young composer had "a powerful desire to please his audience"—an interesting comment, in light of the fact that Zimmerli specifically examined the relationships between composers and audiences for his doctoral degree at Columbia. Zimmerli acknowledged the rift that often occurs between listeners and new music, despite the "years of intensive labor" that composers may have expended on those works. In many ways, he's become a bridge-builder between the esoteric and the popular, writing pieces that are skillfully and intricately crafted, yet sparkle with energy and visceral appeal—qualities that certainly characterize his *Piano Trio No. 1*.

Since Zimmerli was twice named "Best Young Jazz Soloist" by *Downbeat Magazine*, we would expect jazz to play a strong role, and it does—but jazz must jockey for attention among a host of other techniques, many of which are still firmly grounded in the classical world. The four-movement architecture resembles numerous Romantic masterpieces, as do many of the internal structures: the "Allegro," for instance, is a sonata form that opens with a powerful, Brahmsian upward-arching unison for the full ensemble; the rest of the movement has an underlying sense of urgency. The pizzicato cello at the start of "Semplice" hints at a cool jazz texture, but the harp-like sweeps of the piano echo the harmonies of Impressionist composers. Despite the spare opening (that returns to close the movement), the "Semplice" also builds to a passionate peak, with a jazzy piano accompaniment underpinning sinuous lines in the strings. The "Scherzo" is a wild collage, with glimpses of country fiddling, Spanish dance rhythms, and perhaps even a plaintive Hasidic tune. The finale's slow opening is a much-needed breather before the tempestuous "Presto"—a breather for the audience, that is; Zimmerli still puts significant demands on the violin. And, just as the opening of *Piano Trio No. 1* presented a brief evocation of Romanticism, the three sharp hammer-chords at the very end are a quick acknowledgement of the classical tradition that gave birth to piano trios in the first place.

Copyright 2010 by Dr. Alyson McLamore