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K.C. Symphony excels with co-commissioned Andre Previn double concerto

By Floyd E. Gingrich, January 18, 2015

“The violin solo that started off the second of the three movements was particularly attractive. Constructed on a non-diatonic platform, the melody was soon taken by the cello as a continuing canon, and in the context it was easy on the ears. The second movement was melody rich. Laredo and Robinson wore each new section like comfortable, matched, set of lounging clothes, comfortable, and familiar, but still energetically fitting the changing mood, whether smooth, agitated, fast or slow.”

All that is good about modern music was present in Andre Previn's new Double Concerto for Violin Cello and Orchestra, given its Kansas City premier on Friday, Jan. 16, in Helzberg Hall at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, and repeated Saturday and Sunday. It was composed specifically for the guest soloists, husband and wife, Jaime Laredo, violinist and Sharon Robinson, cellist. Their animated interactions fulfilled the potential for the collaboration.

It was as if the middle of the 20th Century never existed, you know, the guys who were trying to repel the whole listening world. Andre Previn has lived a life conducting and composing music that draws people in, to concert halls and to view (and listen) to films and live theater. Right in the first movement was a salute to Stravinsky's chugging strings in The Rite of Spring.

Writing a double concerto provides the opportunity for many kinds of instrumental combinations: solo instruments separately with orchestra or without, two part harmonized melody with or without orchestra, canonic treatments, passing motives back and forth between soloists and the orchestra. Previn used them all, and some other combinations that went by too fast to catch.

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Jaime Laredo

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musicians to turn around and acknowledge the applause from the overflow crowd sitting in the choir loft.

Mozart's Haffner Symphony (number 35) began the program, fresh, adventuresome, optimistic, and certainly not hum-drum. The first movement announced the existence of a great orchestra playing great music. Mozart was not trying to put anyone to sleep with this favorite; few naps continued with the orchestral attack chords. The symphony reminded listeners of Wolfgang's part in developing the symphony form. The second and third movements still reached back to stately dance forms as a basis, while the first and fourth explored adventuresome paths invented in the prodigy's active imagination.

The pounding timpani with legato orchestra that began Johannes Brahms' Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, op. 68 brought the after-intermission crowd to attention. The matured symphonic form in Brahms' hand was informed by each composer before him; you could hear the Mozart influence, but particularly Beethoven. Brahms was reluctant to create a symphony, because it had already been done so well, particularly by Beethoven. This piece, composed in his forties, is a legitimate follow-on to the development of the form, certainly not a copy, and today, unmistakably Brahms. Vestiges of a dance suite were gone. It was martial, then pastoral, intertwined with folk melodies, but never a lullaby. Maestro Stein did not allow the sound to become syrupy; the legato sections were smooth, but still pronounced well. The written music is a masterpiece, so was its realization by Kansas City's treasured ensemble.

Jaime Laredo