

# Naughton twins Christina and Michelle reveal pianistic prowess, times two

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The season closer of the UAB Piano Series on Sunday began routinely enough. Organizer Yakov Kasman customarily books fine pianists -- many of them young -- and Michelle Naughton was no exception.

The student at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of music played confidently and securely in Mendelssohn's Fantasy in F sharp minor, Op. 28, her well- calculated dynamic layering and lightning-quick runs fluidly dispatched. Under her fingers, Rachmaninoff's Variations on a Theme of Corelli took on a wide expressive range. Bass rumblings and jangling strings in one variations gave way to lyrical, heartfelt playing of another. Two monstrously difficult etudes by William Bolcom -- one a likeable and boisterous sample of the the composer's collection of rags -- were clean and brilliant.

After intermission, Michelle's twin sister Christina (or so said the program), came to the Steinway to deliver an equally stellar performance. Mercilessly, Christina wore the same black dress and hair style as her sister, making their identity all the more inscrutable. Three Contrapuncti from Bach's "The Art of Fugue" were studied, yet lucid displays of Bach's genius. "Contrapunctus #9," one of the more difficult movements from the composer's keyboard output, was played with fierce determination.

Chopin's Introduction and Rondo in E flat, Op 16, had an edgy, glistening tone and performed with fluidity and technical precision. Like her sister, Christina, also a Curtis student, met the 20th century challenge with skill and dedication, but with Gyorgy Ligeti. The angular and ominous etude, "Fem," ran the gamut of emotions. "En Suspens" was an atmospheric swirl. But she disclosed the Hungarian composer's ingenuity most adeptly in "L'Eescalier du Diable," a dizzying, sweeping etude that few pianists could pull off.

If these sisters have fundamental musical differences, they're not easy to detect, particularly in a program as diverse as this. When they teamed up for Mendelssohn's "Andante and Variations" in B flat, for four hands, they played seamlessly and expressively, as though cut from the same mold. Two short Brahms encores capped a remarkable recital that was as pleasing to the ear as it was perplexing to the eye.#