

Virtuosic Friendship: Friends of Chamber Music presents “Festive Hungarica”

Libby Hanssen • January 24, 2023



Chad Hoopes, Hyejeon Park, and Jose Franch-Ballester in an exciting finish to Béla Bartók’s “Contrasts” during Friends of Chamber Music’s “Festive Hungarica.” (Image: Andrew Schwartz | Veritography)

The mark of a true professional is to present your best work, no matter the circumstance, but isn’t it always better when you can do good work with good friends?

This was the case with the Friends of Chamber Music’s presentation of “Festive Hungarica,” the series’ first unique program in many a year, performed at the Folly Theater on Saturday.

Typically, the series presents touring artists who play the same repertoire city to city. For this concert, said co-artistic director Dmitri Atapine, they were excited to choose “what to play for you,

For the performance, which featured works from Hungarian composers, they brought in some of their friends from around the country...who are (not coincidentally) virtuosic performers themselves. The warmth and communication between the musicians was evident.



Dmitri Atapine (cello) and Hyeeyeon Park (piano), co-artistic directors for Friends of Chamber Music Kansas City.
(Image: Andrew Schwartz | Veritography)

Atapine and pianist Hyeeyeon Park, Friends' co-artistic directors since Spring of 2022, made their series debut on David Popper's "Hungarian Rhapsody for Cello and Piano." Park's authoritative opening set the tone for the concert: confidence and beauty. Atapine's sound reverberated wonderfully in the Folly Theater during this cello showpiece. The music slipped from dance-like to soulful and back seamlessly, impressive runs that Atapine presented with a fluidity. Popper added cheeky slides and pizzicati, garnering some chuckles from the audience.

They invited five other musicians for this concert, highlighting each of their skills with what Atapine called an "adventurous collection of composers."

Zoltán Koldály's "Serenade" brought together violinists Erin Keefe and Chad Hoopes and violist Paul Neubauer. It was a wonderfully sympathetic performance, each demonstrating an impressive command of quiet. Hoopes' tremolo in the second movement drove the work with control and fervor. I particularly appreciated Neubauer's wine-rich tone against the nectar-sweet timbre of the violins.

Hungary met with America in Béla Bartók's "Contrasts," originally written for Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti and American clarinetist Benny Goodman, and recorded with Bartók himself at the piano. Here, Hoopes, Park and Spaniard Jose Franch-Ballester presented a stunning version.



L-R Erin Keefe, Paul Neubauer, Dmitri Atapine, Hyeyeon Park, David Burd-Marrow, and Jose Franch-Ballester conclude "Festive Hungarica" with Ernst von Dohnányi's Sextet in C Major. (Image: Andrew Schwartz | Veritography)

While most of the impressive solo work went to violin and clarinet, Park tied the voices together and offered sparkling moments. Franch-Ballester was marvelous to witness, especially the wandering melody and his steady, impressive control on the lingering last tone.

The etiquette of not clapping between movements felt like a constraint upon hearing their rendition of Ernst von Dohnányi's Sextet in C Major, each movement presented with such verve and intensity.

Horn player David Byrd-Marrow joined Park, Franch-Ballester, Keefe, Neubauer, and Atapine. Together, they gave a cohesive, well-blended rendition of the work's heroic lines and emotional nuances.

By presenting this unique concert specifically for the Friends' audience, as well as planning future educational and outreach endeavors, the organization signals a readiness to engage more with the community and that a friendship with Kansas City audiences is something worth developing.

Reviewed Saturday January 21, 2023. "Festive Hungarica" was presented by the Friends of Chamber Music Kansas City. www.chambermusic.org.

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