

A first class chamber act

The Peninsula Times Tribune

By Michael Manning

PALO ALTO – Members of the artist faculty of the California Music Center presented a first-class chamber music performance Thursday night in the Cultural Center.

Blending the well known with the unusual, Brahms' Clarinet Quintet stood out as the program highlight.

Beethoven's Trio op.70 No. 1, the "Ghost", was marvelously performed by the International Trio composed of violinist Vasile Beluska, cellist Stefan Reuss and pianist Howard Aibel. The "Ghost" gets its name from the brooding slow movement, which is, of the three movements, the most characteristic of the middle period of the composer's output. In it one finds the harmonic and textural imagination which would later manifest itself in the late sonatas and string quartets. Technically, the performance was very sound and the balance and ensemble were flawless. The difficult unison passages in the final movement were handled deftly and with perfect intonation.

Oboist Marc Fink, violist James Carter and pianist Machiko Kobialka offered the seldom heard, but highly satisfying, Trio by Charles Martin Loeffler. Consisting of two-tone paintings, the style of the work seems torn between the tenets of the Romantic and the early impressionistic schools. The performance was quite good. The rhapsodic nature of the writing calls for a keen sense of coherence and in this regard the players were most convincing. The pianist was at times a little heavy-handed and the viola was lost from the texture – a real shame since Carter had gorgeous tone and a sound almost as full as a cello.

Following intermission, clarinetist Ethan Sloane joined a quartet of strings in the sublime Clarinet Quintet of Brahms. The performance was heavenly especially in the heartbreaking adagio and the buoyant andantino. In the ingenious set of variations with which the work closes, the players were expert in their characterizations and contrasts.