

The International Trio

Waterloo Public Library

A Review by Peter Hamlin

In an age when entertainment comes to us primarily through some electronic medium, or over the vast distance of huge concert halls and amphitheaters, the intimacy of chamber music provides a welcome and refreshing change of scale. In the small recital hall of the new Waterloo Public Library, members of an audience can be almost as near to the musicians as the performers are to each other, and can feel a rare physical and spiritual closeness to a performance.

Last Sunday's library concert presented the International Trio, three brilliant musicians in residence at the University of Northern Iowa School of Music. The program began with Beethoven's Trio in D Major, op.70, no. 2, titled the "Ghost" because of the spooky sound of the second movement. It is perhaps a trivial way to identify such a sublime work, but it beats remembering the opus number and key. This trio is a classic instance of the challenge chamber music poses to the musicians. For with such a small group of instruments, each is constantly alternating between important melodic material, and accompaniment and other background functions. In this piece particularly, the International Trio impeccably carries the listener's attention to the proper line, making the complex seem crystal clear even at first listen.

Chausson's Trio in G Minor, op.3, is not a frequently heard piece. Though not in the same class as the Beethoven trio, it is full of charming coloristic effects and an original melodic sense that includes an almost blues-like major/minor tonal shift in one of the prominent themes.

After a brief rest for intermission, the International Trio returned with the overpowering Tchaikovsky Trio in A Minor, op.50. This piece demands the emotional melodic expressiveness that was given by the players. If Tchaikovsky hoped this music would create a power and sheer dynamic effect more typical of a larger ensemble, this performance could not have disappointed him.

The International Trio, having been together only since late last Fall, continues to demonstrate a striking musical resonance among its members. The music breathes as a single organism, and yet, where appropriate, each performer can exert a strong individual personality. Vasile Beluska exhibits a lovely mellow violin sound, a pleasure to hear in conjunction with his flawless intonation and smooth attack. Stefan Reuss creates a full palette of cello tone, from a light silvery shimmer to a stomach rattling fortissimo. Pianist Howard Aibel has a lightness and clarity of touch that weaves gracefully among the other two lines.

The small crowd of about 65 were virtually unanimous in their enthusiasm for the performance. One could quibble with the choice of program, a bit overpowering for the listener and likely for the performers as well. A meal with three substantial and beautifully prepared main courses still makes one yearn for a salad and perhaps a nice fluffy dessert. But, on the other hand, it was a opportunity to hear, in one sitting, three of the major works in the International Trio's repertoire.