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Review: KLR Trio at Kennedy Center Terrace Theater

By Stephen Brookes
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Photo Credit: Christian Steiner

It's tough being a composer in the 21st century. How do you satisfy those omnivorous modern ears out there, those audiences at home with everything from Monteverdi to Willie Nelson to Tuvan throat-singing? Ask Stanley Silverman. He's nothing if not wide-ranging — the guy once brought Pierre Boulez to a party thrown by Paul Simon. The composer's wildly eclectic Piano Trio No. 2 was the centerpiece of a concert at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater on Monday night by the illustrious Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio.

The KLR players are superstars of the chamber music world, and from the first notes of the evening it was clear why. Opening with Beethoven's not-too-serious Piano Trio in B-Flat Major, Op. 11 — an entertaining work whose main claim to fame is its variations on a popular song of the time — the trio gave it a rich and comfortably unbuttoned reading.

But the Beethoven was merely a prelude to Silverman's work, which received its Washington premiere. The Piano Trio No. 2, "Reveille," caroms freely among styles: A spiky modernist opening softens into an ethereal melody, which warps into a sensuous Cuban Guajira, which transforms into a classical fugue while Renaissance dances drift hither and yon, until the whole thing bursts into an anything-goes riff on Paul Simon's "You Can Call Me Al." It's sort of a hot mess — Silverman himself says the piece "is not intended to 'hang together' any more than life itself," and, fair enough, it doesn't. **But imaginative writing, a complete lack of stuffiness and a hugely enthusiastic reading by the KLR players (for whom it was written) made up for the kitchen-sink feeling, and it proved to be an engaging — if sometimes head-scratching — listen.**

As for **Brahms's Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, Op. 8, which closed the program, there is only one thing to say: If you missed this performance, you should regret it bitterly for the rest of your life.** It's a ravishing work, an epic masterpiece by the young and unfathomably mature Brahms (he was 20 when he wrote it), and **it would be hard to imagine a more passionate, perfectly controlled and absolutely radiant reading than it received from the KLR players.**