

Reviews

Your monthly critical round-up of performances, recordings and publications

CONCERTS

New York

Intense interaction:
Gidon Kremer and
Daniil Trifonov



GIDON KREMER (VIOLIN)
DANIIL TRIFONOV (PIANO)
CARNEGIE HALL 23 JANUARY 2015

Given Gidon Kremer's achievements, particularly in championing composers such as Mieczyslaw Weinberg, the violinist's subdued sound in this recital with pianist Daniil Trifonov came as something of a disappointment. (I couldn't help but wonder if a smaller venue might have been a wiser choice.) Kremer's tone was lyrical and pristine in Mozart's Violin Sonata in E flat major K481 but there's a difference between soft and 'not projecting'. Despite a jaunty final Allegretto, overall Trifonov seemed to be pulling back to avoid overpowering his colleague. Weinberg's Fifth Violin Sonata op.53 fared better, with intense interaction between the two soloists.

After the interval, Kremer's tone bloomed noticeably for Weinberg's Solo Violin Sonata no.3 (1979), a virtuoso caprice packed with dissonant double-stops (intervals often in major or minor 2nds) and heroic ascents on the E string. In Schubert's Fantasy in C major D934, Kremer

sang out over Trifonov's lovely passagework, and the spirited, martial finale had many in the audience standing.

The best came last, in two encores: a brief flash of Mozart (from the Sonata in C major K404), followed by *Rag-Gidon-Time*, an amusing, stuttering waltz by Giya Kancheli, which had Kremer and Trifonov – and the audience – grinning with pleasure.

BRUCE HODGES

JENNIFER KOH (VIOLIN)
92 Y, KAUFMANN CONCERT HALL 31 JANUARY 2015

It's both brave and beautiful, lonely and strong to stand on a stage alone with one's instrument. Violinist Jennifer Koh has mastered this art and made it her own. 'Bach and Beyond', a project in which Koh programmed Bach's Sonatas and Partitas alongside modern works and new commissions, culminated this month at the 92 Y. This programme paired Bach's A minor and C major sonatas with

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

Our pick of the
new releases



Philippe Graffin
explores
neglected works
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**The Aquinas
Trio** impresses
in Mendelssohn
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**Andrianov and
Urasin** perform
Russian
masterpieces
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Berio's *Sequenza VIII* and John Harbison's *For Violin Alone*, a world premiere.

Koh's Bach is not as nuanced as some, and toes a puzzling line between performance-practice purist and old-school romantic. She uses vibrato sparingly and chooses untempered intervals in her intonation. However, her playing is thoughtful and well structured, and her complete command of the score is impressive. The second half of the A minor Andante was exquisite and the C major Fuga was powerful and masterfully executed.

The Berio was performed with conviction and magnificent technique, a thoughtful answer to the Bach. Koh's performance of the acrobatic and ephemeral seven-movement *For Violin Alone* was captivating, honouring Harbison's intent to create 'a rich harmonic palette through double-stopped strings, evocative voice-leading and supple polyphony'. The piece is brilliantly conceived, Koh's interpretation equally so. Particularly moving was the Air, with its gentle pizzicato and lyrical phrases. The March was also highly enjoyable and, despite its technical challenges, Koh captured its playfulness, often with a slight smile.

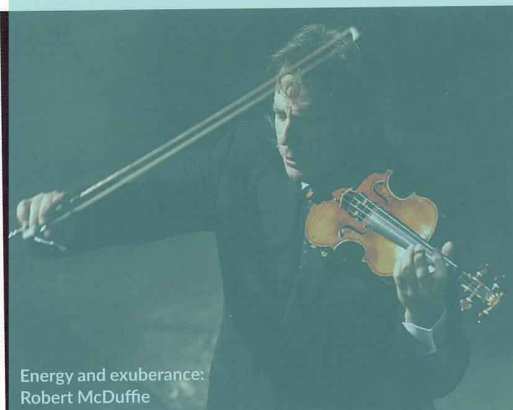
LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

ROBERT McDUFFIE & THE McDUFFIE CENTER FOR STRINGS

LE POISSON ROUGE 9 FEBRUARY 2015

While the atmosphere was festive and spirits were high at the Rome Chamber Music Benefit Concert, featuring violinist Robert McDuffie and his string ensemble at Le Poisson Rouge, the performances themselves left something to be desired.

McDuffie opened the programme playing John Adams's *Road Movies*, tackling the piece with great energy and aplomb but little precision. His rhythm was questionable – sometimes rushing and sometimes dragging – and simply felt inconsistent rather than 'swung' (as the final movement indicates). The second movement calls for a scordatura tuning, the G string of the violin tuned down to an F, and McDuffie retuned between movements. However, an instrument needs time to settle and the F did not stick (a second instrument would have been preferable), creating intonation problems in a movement filled with double-stops that should have been sublime. Despite these shortcomings, McDuffie nonetheless played with laudable energy, eagerness and exuberance, and the crowd was more than appreciative.



Energy and exuberance:
Robert McDuffie

The second half of the performance featured McDuffie's String Ensemble from Mercer University in Georgia. Elliot Goldenthal's *Lyric Suite: Floods of Avon* (a world premiere, scored for string quartet, string orchestra and piano) was certainly worth hearing again, with fantastic solos by the concertmaster and principal cellist – most impressive given that they were students. Bartók's Divertimento for strings closed the concert; after a lugubrious start it finished well, with energy and delight.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

DANISH QUARTET

ALICE TULLY HALL, 20 FEBRUARY 2015

The Danish Quartet gave an absolutely delightful performance of Haydn's op.54 no.2 in C major. The sprightly first movement was filled with joy and first violinist Frederik Oland's solos in the Adagio were imaginative and captivating. The Menuetto was appropriately tongue-in-cheek and the finale opened with a rich and unapologetic viola and cello unison, although later in the movement both first violin and cello seemed a bit hesitant in higher registers.

Nielsen's Fourth Quartet in F major followed and the Danish – champions of and experts in this music – gave a compelling performance. Indeed, the performance was spectacular – fragments of phrases built on each other in a logical and ardent way, resulting in a lyrical and passionate interpretation.

For Brahms's incredible F minor Piano Quintet, which closed the concert, the quartet was joined by pianist Jon Kimura Parker. Although the interpretation lacked something in spontaneity and risk-taking, the quartet's rich sound – especially present when highlighting darker harmonies – more than made up for any lack of whimsicality.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH