

# Violinist and pianist brilliant performers

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CHARLEMONT — Mohawk Trail Concerts continued its outstanding series of "masterpieces" this past weekend with a brilliant performance by violinist Rolf Schulte and pianist Andrew Rangell. Though the featured work was the Opus 78 Sonata by Brahms, the remaining pieces by Beethoven, Prokofiev and Ravel could all be called "masterpieces" in each their own genre. The performances took place Friday and Saturday evenings at the Federated Church.

It was clear from the opening phrase of the Beethoven Sonata (Op. 30, No. 2), that Schulte and Rangell are probing interpreters — having carefully contemplated, understood and inwardly felt each passage.

In his remarks before the Brahms Sonata, Schulte spoke reverentially of the music, inviting audience members to "dream it with us." This phrase poetically and accurately described the unique experience for those of us in attendance; for the musicians apparently did not see themselves performing for us so much as sharing with us their love of the music and their enjoyment in playing it together. Seen in this light, it made perfect sense — and did not seem disrespectful — that Schulte frequently turned his back to the audience in order to fully face his colleague.

They made the evening their own: to drink in the miracle of musical creation, to experiment, to take risks, to exchange ideas and feelings. Though happy to have us present, it seemed that they would have played no differently had it only been the two of them in the concert hall.

Their approach seemed particularly well suited to the 20th century half of the program. As the performers remarked, the Five Melodies, Op. 35b, by Prokofiev, formed a work that was lyrical throughout. Instead of the restless and driving moods one usually encounters in Prokofiev, subtle moods — from haunting to humorous — were evoked.

Ravel's 1927 Sonata is a fascinating work, containing jazz and blues elements. Rangell pointed out the influence of Gershwin in the "Blues" movement — but what struck me was how organically Ravel had integrated these popular elements (at times the violin imitates a banjo.

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trumpet, etc.) into his own vocabulary and palette. The final movement brought down the house, treating us to a full display of Schulte's astounding virtuosity.

Rangell and Schulte do not play together regularly. Originally, MTC artistic director Arnold Black, having been impressed with the pianist's recordings, asked Rangell to perform. Rangell responded that his preference would be to appear with Schulte.

"Rolf is always listening," Rangell told me after the concert to describe how playing with the violinist brings out the best in his own playing. The same could be said of Rangell. I could appreciate his particular listening powers in the first movement of the Ravel, where he brought life to a series of block chords by sounding a middle note a split-second ahead of the others in each chord. His pedaling was subtle, gentler than most pianists — except in the Beethoven, where he reinforced certain accents with the pedal as though it were a bass drum.

Schulte is a monster on the violin. Never have I seen someone with more control over the bow. He actually "chokes up" on the bow (as might a Little Leaguer on a bat), grasping it 3 inches up from the "frog" (handle). One would have to be watching to discern when he changed from down-stroke to up-stroke, so seamlessly was it executed.

He appeared to be able to begin a bow stroke without any scraping sound, even on loud notes. This meant he could save percussive timbres for where they would have the boldest effect; and he did not shy from producing "ugly" sounds for musical purpose. His body was in constant motion, one heel often off the floor, sometimes in a lunge or a side-stepping chasse.

When I asked about his unusual hold on the bow, as Schulte was exiting the church, he replied that it was something he had developed over a period of time to best configure with his slight build. Then he set his bag down to continue the conversation, for he had questions of his own to ask. This seemed to typify both his and Rangell's approach to music and, perhaps, to life: always curious, always listening, inviting you into their dreams.