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CONCERT REVIEW INC.

Pro Musicis Concert Series 2012 in Review

*Andrew Staupe, piano, Alexandria Le, piano
Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall; New York, NY
April 11, 2012*

Pro Musicis award winners Andrew Staupe and Alexandria Le appeared in a shared recital that also was each pianist's New York debut. With three world premiere pieces and some of the great works in the piano repertoire, it had the makings of a fascinating evening. Happily, this was the case, as both performers brought brilliance, poetry, and a deep understanding of their respective selections.

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Mr. Staupe took the first half of the recital and opened with the Fantasy in F-sharp Minor, Op. 28, by Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847). Commonly called “Scottish Fantasy”, this work is Mendelssohn's musical impression of Scotland, imbued with the spirit of the ancient poet Ossian. Mr. Staupe demonstrated a good sense of drama, with a confident manner, never allowing the stormy moments to be muddled or the lyrical sections to become overly sentimental, ending this work with a driven passion. Two world premiere works followed without break between them. As Mr. Staupe informed the audience, these works were written especially for him by composers who are his close friends. The first by Christopher Walczak (b.1970), “Dark Blue Etude”, is in the words of the composer, “a hyper-compressed sonata form with a disproportionate coda”. Indeed, it was over almost as soon as it began, but was played with subtlety. I'd like to hear this work again, but at a much slower tempo! “Delusion” by Karl Blench (b. 1981) relies on the performer to choose the pace (“play the notes as fast as comfortably possible”), which makes each performance unique, but highly dependent on the ability of the performer. Mr. Staupe's technical prowess made it a success. Following these premieres was “La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune”, from the Préludes, Book II, of Claude Debussy (1862-1918). Awash in exoticism, this work requires a nuanced touch, which Mr. Staupe provided in a delicate and crystalline performance. The pianissimo final measures were stunningly rendered with a clarity I have rarely heard. “Rudepoêma” by Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) ended Mr. Staupe's half. This massive work, with elements of savagery is not for the faint of heart (listener and performer alike!). Described by some as a Brazilian “Le Sacre du Printemps”, I disagree; this work is the essence of Villa-Lobos – raw genius overflowing with ideas and passion. Mr. Staupe gave a brilliant performance, handling the virtuosic demands with apparent ease, capturing the savage without ever resorting to pounding, and maintaining a tremendous level of stamina and power. After the four final fist-driven hammer blows, the audience responded with what appeared to be bewildered applause. I was stunned- this was one of the most incredible performances of this masterpiece I have ever heard, live or recorded. I wanted to shout out to the audience, “Wake up! Don't you realize you have had the privilege of hearing a once-in-a-lifetime performance!” Almost as an apology, Mr. Staupe played a Scarlatti sonata as an encore (stating “let me play something without my fist”), which he did with grace.