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## Masters of the chamber music genre

REVIEW By Rebecca Zuill

Bermuda Festival –of the  
Performing Arts

Trio Hochelaga

23 February 2010

City Hall Theatre

The discovery of really superb artists and bringing them to Bermuda's stage is the enduring and great strength of the Bermuda Festival of the Performing Arts.

Year after year they have achieved this, their accomplishments including the visits of The Aquila Theatre and Interpreti Veneziani amongst many, many others.

There was an important addition to that list when Trio Hochelaga performed at the Festival two weeks ago, on February 23 at the City Hall Theatre.

As the reviewer of this concert I must apologise now for the lateness of this review – the blame lies with a protracted bout of flu which concluded with a terrific crescendo this last week.

Happily, it is trailing away, albeit in an undulating diminuendo, but I am now strong enough to tackle it!

Trio Hochelaga are violinist Anne Robert, cellist Paul Marleyn and pianist Stéphane Lemelin.

This Canadian chamber group is described as one of that country's most important musical ensembles, and upon the first phrases of Schubert's Notturmo for Piano, Violin and Cello in E-flat major, D.897 it was immediately apparent why this is the case.

These musicians are described as passionate about chamber music and that is evident; not only is their enjoyment of it palpable and infectious, but their mastery of the genre is well beyond the ordinary.

At risk of understating it, each piece was a very closely woven performance – these are exceptional musicians and their acute sensitivity to their fellow performers is something rarely heard; it is, I think, the quality that sets Trio Hochelaga well apart.

The programme was another indicator of their zeal; the pieces chosen were each really wonderful musically while adding to our own appreciation of the genre. An important aspect of the evening was the musicians' own entertaining and elucidating descriptions of what was to come.

Additionally Trio Hochelaga's selection of music and composers do a great service to the classical world by including works that are not necessarily at the top of every audience member's list, and yet their performances were invariably so engaging that their listeners could



Trio Hochelaga



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I, for one, have never really understood the appeal of Mendelssohn but Trio Hochelaga's performance of his Trio in C minor, Opus 66 brought his work so strongly and sympathetically into focus I have quite changed my view.

Here the cello, violin and piano were exceptionally well balanced, and while one was certainly aware of the individual lines of music it is the uncanny acuteness of their dynamic interplay that sets Trio Hochelaga apart.

This was the case, whether it was the violin holding the melody, perfectly foiled by the cello and piano in the first movement, or the passion the trio build together, demonstrating a tremendous intensity and feeling in the second movement, or the quick, meticulous and delightful scherzo of the third, or the hymn-like finale (it is the tune of the famous Old One Hundred) ornamented with a sense of the whimsical.

It concludes in very grand style, and pianist Stéphane Lemelin did relish this virtuoso moment.

Schumann's Adagio and Allegro for Cello and Piano, Opus 70 was the opening work for the second half of the performance. Described as one of the great poets of musical history, this piece is helpful in understanding why he has this reputation.

It opens very beautifully; it is rich and meditative, and is also a chance to hear how fine a cellist Paul Marleyn is.

In respect to the parts, in this work Schumann seems less cohesive than Mendelssohn, and so they were more distinct, the piano providing a backdrop to the cello's part.

Pianist Stéphane Lemelin gave the audience the opportunity to compare the technical masterpiece that is Chopin's Impromptu in F-sharp major Opus 36, described as the composer's most developed, and his Fantasy-Impromptu in C-sharp minor, Opus 66, unquestionably his most famous.

The impromptu in F sharp major is lovely, notable for its complexity and variety of musical thoughts, yet with a steadiness of form, while the Fantasy is tremendously and immediately appealing for its highly romantic melody, enhanced with spiralling scales and dramatic chords.

There is no doubt that this is a gorgeous piece of music and Mr. Lemelin gave a wonderful performance.

It must be difficult to resist playing this piece for all it's worth, but the pianist exacted far more from it with a moderated presentation, so the audience could really enjoy the subtleties of the phrasing and the demands required of his technique.

Who could ask for more from a violinist? Anne Robert's enthusiasm for her instrument was palpable: performing on a 1735 violin built by Giuseppe Guarneri, who is comparable with — and some say better than — Stradivarius, she described how Paganini himself bought and performed upon an instrument created by that same craftsman.

She also explained that Paganini suffered from a disease of the fingers which enabled him to perform in a far more complex manner than less afflicted mortals.

As a result, his compositions are often fiendishly difficult to play. Nonetheless, Ms Robert performed with spirit and alacrity his Caprice No. 13 for Violin solo, which is also called 'The Devil's chuckle' — the similarity to eerie laughter is one of Paganini's more notorious technical accomplishments.

The piece is unquestionably tough to play, without question written for such a violin and such a violinist, and for the audience it is impressive from a technical point of view and certainly for evoking

**this devilish effect.**

**In direct contrast, the well-loved Méditation de Thaïs by Massenet is a musical description of an Egyptian's courtesan's internal debate of whether to choose a life of celibacy.**

**The heart-rending nature of this piece taps into the fundamental truth that whichever decision one makes in this regard there is always loss.**

**It is simply gorgeous; this was an extraordinarily evocative performance, a musical description of conflicting emotions with which we as human beings are all familiar.**

**Brahms' Hungarian Dance No. 5 in E minor brought the trio back to the stage to perform this very famous gypsy romp; dramatic and dynamic, it nonetheless calls for a meticulous performance to ensure its colour and vibrancy, and Trio Hochelaga gave it that.**

**The programme concluded with Smetana's Trio in G minor. Smetana is known as the father of Czech music, and this piece was written as he mourned the death of his small daughter.**

**It was music with which I – and I daresay many in the audience – were unfamiliar, but it was another that demonstrated the remarkable degree of empathy that these performers have with one another.**

**This is a very haunting piece; the spirit and the memories of the child are found often in the piano part, while the emotional wretchedness of her father is described by the strings, providing a highly dramatic conclusion to this programme.**

**An appreciative audience called for an encore and they complied with Mendelssohn's D Minor trio; a romantic piece that really is the epitome of beauty, and for me another reminder to look again at this remarkable composer – and for Trio Hochelaga wherever they may be performing.**

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## TRIO HOCHELAGA ★★☆☆



*Robert Cram*  
flûte

*Georges Migot*  
ATMA Clas-  
sique/Naxos ●

Au fil des ans,  
le Trio Hoche-  
laga a dévelop-  
pé une esthé-  
tique toute  
particulière qui

combine rigueur et sensibilité. Avec cette nouveauté, nous partons à la découverte du compositeur, peintre et philosophe français Georges Mingot (1891-1976) qui se situe entre Ravel et une certaine forme d'avant-garde. Empreintes de nostalgie, ses compositions trouvent avec le Trio Hoichelaga une résonnance parfaite. Une belle découverte.

# Hochelaga Trio has audience rightly murmuring 'Wow!'

BY RICHARD TODD, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN    JULY 29, 2009

There was some dissension over my glowing description of the acoustics at Southminster United Church so, when I went to review the Hochelaga Trio on Tuesday afternoon, I sat in a different location. The front row of the balcony, theoretically, should provide the best sound.

The Hochelagas played music by Haydn, Mendelssohn and Schumann (whose bicentennial we'll be celebrating next year), an exceptionally congenial program for a muggy afternoon. Haydn's Trio in E-flat came across as cheery as well as musically balanced and precise.

The Trio no. 2 in F minor represented Schumann. F minor is not the breeziest of keys, but the work is by no means heavy or overwrought, and the Hochelagas played it with a spirit and understanding that made one forget to swelter for a while.

The concluding offering was Mendelssohn's Piano Trio no. 2 in C minor, also not a breezy key. But this composer's music, while it can be turbulent, is never without a bedrock of optimism. The Hochelagas built their very solid account of the score on it and produced a pleasing account of the trio. At the end of the first movement, the audience uttered a collective "Wow!"

And the acoustics? Well, they could be more detailed, at least for the piano sound. Yet it's a small problem and the strings, Tuesday as well as Sunday, sounded warm and beautiful.

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Tuesday » November  
11 » 2008

## Hochelagas lend passion to Mendelssohn, Haydn trios

**Richard Todd**

The Ottawa Citizen

*Monday, November 10, 2008*

There's a sad old saying that if the number of people in the audience exceeds the number on stage, well, things could be worse.

Things could have been worse in the University of Ottawa's Tabaret Hall yesterday afternoon when the audience outnumbered the musicians by almost 10 to one. But that's faint consolation given that the onstage contingent was a trio, even less when it's an outstanding ensemble like the Hochelaga Trio.

The program was not entirely alluring, though the works by Haydn and Mendelssohn are worth frequent hearings.

One of the Hochelagas' self-assigned mandates is the exploration and promotion of the work of neglected French composers like Théodore Dubois (1886-1924).

Dubois was a reasonably successful musician in his time, though nowadays, his modest reputation is based almost entirely on the pious and sentimental *Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross*.

His *Trio no. 1 in C minor* doesn't contain a whiff of the smoke of revolution that was blowing through the musical life of Europe in its time. A talented pupil of Mendelssohn might almost have written it 50 years earlier. According to Stéphane Lemelin, the trio's pianist, the piece was not played between the time of the composer's death and its rediscovery by the Hochelagas a few years ago. (They've also recorded it on the ATMA label.)

It's a well-crafted piece. In its historical context, it does seem laden with empty gestures; if it had been written in, say, 1850, though, it might strike the listener differently. In any case, it's enjoyable enough taken on its own merits and the Hochelaga Trio played it with obvious affection yesterday.

2009 will mark the 200th anniversary of Haydn's death and Mendelssohn's birth and the Trio has built most of its season around the works of those composers.

The program began with Haydn's *Trio no. 15 in G* in a well-shaped performance that had lots of drive. If it lacked one thing, it was lightness of touch in the outer movements, though they were not particularly staid either. The *Andante* was lovely.

The highlight of the afternoon was Mendelssohn's *Trio no. 1 in D minor* in a

big, bold reading that brought out the work's nearly symphonic dimensions. It was a continuously passionate performance. Even in the Scherzo the musicians resisted the temptation to sprinkle the music with fairy dust as so many trios do.

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