

Music@Menlo 2017/18 Critical Acclaim

ON THE FESTIVAL

‘The bounty of opportunities for listening and learning is too much for most mortals to take in...’

SFCV

“The Music@Menlo chamber-music festival fills a major summer void in concerts with players from all over who are downright virtuosic.”

ARTSSF

“London helped get the 2018 season — the 16th iteration of this continuously flexible and imaginative undertaking — under way...”

San Francisco Chronicle

“The common denominator is, whatever the chronological ages, these are all outstanding musical artists. I have been floored by the quality of the performances by teenagers in the Koret Young Performers Concert Series and even more so with their near elders in the Prelude Performers Series. Let alone, the greater appreciation when the pros take their turns in the big time Concert Programs.”

The Daily Journal

“The establishment of a major chamber music festival in the San Francisco Bay area in the midst of the 2002 dot.com meltdown was an entrepreneurial miracle that has been sustained for seventeen seasons.”

“I have been to many of these events in the past seventeen years and can attest to the high performance levels and the joy of being in a community of musicians and educators for three exciting weeks.”

Audiophile Audition

ON THE FESTIVAL'S CHAMBER MUSIC INSTITUTE

"A summer festival in Silicon Valley initiates young players into the joys and challenges of chamber music and then sends them out into the world to spread the word. It seems to be working."

"A map of more than 20 international festivals that have been inspired by Music@Menlo shows an impressive conversion rate so far."

"If this is a cult, sign me up."

"At first I'm taken aback by their aplomb. By the end of the concert, featuring 28 musicians ranging in age from 11 to 18, each of whom articulates something special about the work they're about to play, I'm in awe..."

Elbow Music

"The most memorable moment for me in the opening weekend (July 14-16) of Music@Menlo's 15th season was the most unlikely: I entered a high school classroom to observe a coaching session – with two 10-year olds!...even for this experienced critic, this was 'taste 'em again for the first time.' I walked away appreciating Dvorak's miniature with new depth and feeling."

"...one powerful effect of Menlo on many who have studied there has been the broadening of perspective beyond one's own career as a soloist. As a result, 19 'alumni' have started their own festivals modeled to some degree on Menlo."

American Record Guide, Nov-Dec 2017

"The red-hot, passionate brilliance of a truly great performance that listeners hope for appeared in — of all things — Ernő Dohnányi's Piano Quintet No. 1 in the Prelude concert preceding the evening's event."

"... but the young professional International Program Artists of the Chamber Music Institute who played this outdid in emphasis everyone else who's tackled it." (Ernő Dohnányi's Piano Quintet No. 1)

"...it proves yet again Menlo's secret, that the free Prelude concerts are often as good as or even superior to the main events."

"The preceding Prelude Performance, across the way in Martin Family Hall, offered treasures of its own. Cellist Connor Kim and pianist Chelsea Wang gave a gently melodic account of Mendelssohn's fairly lively Cello Sonata No. 1, and an ensemble of other International Program Artists was burningly acidic in an exciting and vivid reading of Ernest Bloch's often microtonal Piano Quintet No. 1."

“Alexi Kenney...is the first performer in Menlo’s 16-year history to have appeared in all three of its artistic programs: first in the Young Performers Program, then the International Program, and finally this evening for the first time as a mainstage artist.”

SFCV

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL’S ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

“What makes them particularly interesting is the way they’ve become forerunners in the new world of artistic endeavor. It’s long been clear that it’s no longer enough to be a superb musician, no matter how driven. Everybody’s driven. The new trinity is performing, promoting, and entrepreneurship. You could argue that the last two are much more important than the first. The principles according to Wu Han and Finckel are unchanging: you court patrons, trust the audience, deliver excellence, and remain flexible. And keep humor next to your breast at all times. To do all that effectively and consistently over a long period of time, you need to be a fanatic.”

“Not to overstate it, but the fact is that the “Finckels, and others like them, may be the best shot to keep classical music in this country, in the broadest sense, relevant and vibrant.”

SFCV

"Music@Menlo' should rightly be call 'Miracle at Menlo,' since the founders, cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han, from a lonely standing start, in six summer sessions at Menlo School in Atherton, have raised the long-neglected chamber music of western civilization from relative obscurity in these here parts to a standing room only, highly appreciative audience in the Bay Area.

The Daily Journal

“The mission and its realisation are inseparable – which makes the pair relatively rare among classical musicians, who often prefer to keep their heads in the clouds.”

Elbow Music

ABOUT MENLO LIVE (2017 “The Glorious Violin”)

“Music@Menlo’s 2017 season, the Atherton, California, organization’s 15th festival, has been captured splendidly in *The Glorious Violin*, a set of eight CDs of superb live recordings, but the title is an understatement...”

“Giovanni Battista Viotti, who had a major role in popularizing the [violin], is certainly better known, but you’d have a hard time finding his *Duetto for Solo Violin* performed as brilliantly as it is here by Adam Barnett-Hart.”

“I was impressed — touched even — by the sincerely awestruck tone of the introduction to the set...”

SFCV

“[Arnaud Sussman’s] performance of the Mozart Sonata K. 526 demonstrates a fervent and polished tone that is just flat out beautiful.”

“*Bach’s Double Violin Concerto, BWV 1043* fizzes with delight.”

“It’s the best performance of this quartet I’ve ever heard.” (Borodin’s *Second String Quartet*)

“Anyone interested in exploring the evolution of the violin in chamber music will find an intriguing blend of favorites and unfamiliar works that will be a source of constant discovery and satisfaction.”

“Rest assured that the live performances are superb. The recordings are simply the best live chamber music documented today. That’s due to six-time Grammy Award-winning record producer Da-Hong Seetoo who has engineered these recordings for fifteen consecutive seasons.”

“This set is a joy for the string lover.”

Audiophile Audition

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

“...the audience, virtually in critical mass since the first movement’s final cadence, was more than prepared to explode in raptures when the last chords sounded, and delighted pandemonium roared through Menlo.” (Mendelssohn Piano Trio no. 2 in c minor)

Peninsula Reviews

“...Barnett-Hart’s fanfare opening, keenly shaped phrases, subtle expression; highly rhythmic, buoyant flow; and articulated trills turned it into a flawless, virtuosic, aesthetic reading.”

“Indeed, perfect ensemble was the one quality present in all 15 works I heard over the weekend, even in the two played by young professionals.”

“In the second concert, violinist Adam Barnett-Hart once again brought top quality to everything he touched...his flawless technique, lyricism, and tasteful rubato displayed his peerless musicality.”

“...here pianist Gloria Cheng’s clear, buoyant playing brought out Sussmann’s finest qualities...the second movement was touchingly serene. And in the virtuosic finale, Cheng played the parallel scales at a tempo so fast that even a computer couldn’t find the downbeat, yet Sussmann did with eloquent grace.”

American Record Guide

“Pianist Wu Han was an encouraging partner, warm and supportive in the melancholy moments and furiously on point in the big runs.”

“Wu Han delivered brilliant waterfalls of notes, while Huang added fierce runs and an impossibly breathless finish.”

Repeat Performances

“The performance, with pianist Jon Kimura Parker serving as ringleader and anchor, was both brilliant and handsomely nuanced.” (Poulenc Sextet for Woodwind Quintet and Piano)

“Saturday’s ensemble — violinist Arnaud Sussmann, violist Paul Neubauer and cellists David Requiro and David Finckel — gave it a warm and eloquent rendition.” (Arensky String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 35)

“...a robust, emotionally detailed account of excerpts from the song cycle “From Jewish Folk Poetry,” done with probing intensity by soprano Lyubov Petrova, contralto Sara Couden and tenor Kang Wang.”

San Francisco Chronicle

“...the ensemble colored this unusual mix of instruments with brio and crisp, ardent articulation, a real aperitif to a stunning feast of Russian modes.” (Glinka *Trio Pathétique* in A Minor)

“Arnaud Sussmann’s violin often sang in high relief over the other instruments, his *ariosi* and double-stops ringing with pungent fervor.”

“...the first half of the concert ended on a note of heroic valediction...”

“The grim beauty of both the work and its glowing, resonant interpretation gave us due pause – and applause – whether to recognize the musicians or weep for the state of our world.” (Shostakovich *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Op. 79)

Peninsula Reviews

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San Francisco Chronicle

“...Gilbert Kalish played the accompaniment with quietly brilliant expression.”

“The players’ chamber music background showed in their ability, even with a small orchestra, to express minute variations of volume and emphasis, contributing character to the piece. The numerous solos of concertmaster Paul Huang were as smooth and energetic as the ensemble work.” (Handel Op. 6, No. 5, in D Major)

“This was another masterful rendition of chamber music writ large.” (Grieg *Holberg Suite* for Strings, Op. 40)

San Mateo Daily Journal

"I was particularly struck by Gilbert Kalish's understated but intense piano-playing and Sara Couden's wonderful contralto voice, but the whole thing was terrific and indeed hair-raising in the way that only the best Shostakovich can be. It made a fitting end to a glorious concert." (Shostakovich *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, Op. 79)

Threepenny Review/The Lesser Blog

"For charm and a sense of goofiness welcome in Menlo's solemn precincts, nothing could outdo contralto Sara Couden's performance of the fourth work on the program, Telemann's *Canary Cantata*."

"Menlo was fortunate to have Paul Neubauer available to perform this program. He is a violist of boldness and strong presence."

SFCV

"The performance and musical timbre of three superb string players, violinists Arnaud Sussmann and Erin Keefe and violist Paul Neubauer in 'Terzetto in C Major op. 74' by Antonin Dvorak, was exquisite bordering on the ravishing."

"...one needs to find the words to acknowledge the young The Escher Quartet...and declare it has the richest blending of sound since I last heard the Peninsula's Ives Quartet."

"...the French Horn performer William VerMeulen is one of the best I have ever heard."

The Daily Journal

"Kodály's Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7...got a soulful, vivacious rendition from violinist Bella Hristova and cellist Nicholas Canellakis..."

"...a pointedly fierce account by the Calidore String Quartet...with playing that was vigorous, sharp-edged and tender." (Bartok's Fifth String Quartet)

San Francisco Chronicle

"Even though I've heard this group (The Calidore Quartet) before, such transparency and utter clarity in performance hardly seemed credible to the ear." (Bartok's Fifth String Quartet)

"Violinist Bella Hristova and cellist Nicholas Canellakis showed total virtuosity... High wailing and light, shining double stops for violin and expressive, almost cruel-sounding, low tremolo growls from the cello were just some of the interesting sounds they produced."

“The emotional range of the music (Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht*), from buzzing fierceness in tremolo passages and spookiness under mutes to poignant sweetness in sections that seemed a nod to the spirit of the salon, was profound...Here was emotive expressiveness that entirely broke the boundaries of salon convention.

SFCV

“But then the Bartók!! The Calidore String Quartet, this season’s Music@Menlo ‘house band,’ again brought a sophisticated audience to their feet with their flawless performance and emotional immediacy in Béla Bartók’s String Quartet No. 5.”

“Anthony McGill played the clarinet line with cool runs and wistful humor...”

“These six performers were a dream team, and the audience stood in ovation once again.” (Sextet in C Major by Ernő Dohnányi)

Repeat Performances