



## Violinist Daniel Hope in Impressive Debut at Music@Menlo

by Edward Reichel

August 1, 2011

**MUSIC@MENLO, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, July 31**

The works played at Sunday's Music@Menlo concert in St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Palo Alto, Calif., were linked by a common thread – they were all by composers who were influenced in one way or another by the great violin virtuoso and composer Joseph Joachim. Central to this program was the music of Johannes Brahms, whose wonderful Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, op. 78, and ardent Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor, op. 25, were in the spotlight. There were also pieces by Antonin Dvorak, Clara Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn and Joachim himself – making the program complete and meaningful.

Playing this music was British violinist Daniel Hope, in his Music@Menlo debut. Hope is a consummate artist, a musician's musician whose interpretative talents are quite remarkable. As he demonstrated Sunday he knows the romantic repertoire intimately. He brought a richness and lushness to his playing that added depth and dimension to the music. And as a collaborator, he is one of the best. At Sunday's concert, he played with some of today's great chamber musicians – pianist Wu Han, cellist David Finckel and violist Paul Neubauer. The result was magical.

Hope opened his program with Dvorak's Four Romantic Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 75. It was fascinating to hear how Hope effortlessly captured the distinctive character of each piece; his playing was at times lyrically flowing, energetic and quietly contemplative. And Wu Han was the perfect musical partner. She brought a fine balance that let them be on equal terms.

The two also played several short pieces – Schumann's gorgeous Romance, op. 22, no. 1, which Hope played lovingly; Joachim's lyrically effusive Romance, op. 2, no. 1; and two transcriptions of songs by Mendelssohn, the softly expressive *Auf Flügeln des Gesanges* (On Wings of Song) and the dramatic *Hexenlied* (Witch's Song).

Before intermission, Hope and Wu Han played one of the two large works by Brahms that were programmed, the Violin Sonata in G major.

Much like the B flat Sextet, the G major Sonata is one of Brahms' most lyrically infused works. It lacks the impassioned anguish one associates with his music. Instead, it is a beautifully expressive work that still has moments that are emotionally charged with tension; these passages, however, don't spoil the overall mood of bright optimism that characterizes the music.

Hope and Wu Han brought that out wonderfully. It was a very cohesive account that flowed naturally from one section to another.



As in the brief Schumann piece, Hope played the sonata with loving attention to the minutest details, bringing depth of expression to his interpretation. It was nuanced and eloquently poetic.

The evening closed with the Piano Quartet in G minor.

With a musical dream team assembled (Hope, Finckel, Neubauer and Wu Han), the quartet was given an incredibly powerful and compelling reading that captured the passion and energy of the music. It was a wonderfully musical performance in which the players delved into the subtleties of the score. The four musicians brought a richly resonant and romantic sound to their playing that was amazingly homogeneous yet also quite distinct.

The pyrotechnics of the Hungarian rondo finale, with its demonic tempos and rapid fire passages, brought the audience to its feet. It was a well deserved standing ovation because this was a flawless, musically rewarding performance that was mesmerizing. One will hardly find it played better – live or recorded.