

# San Francisco Classical Voice

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## RECITAL REVIEW

### Highs and Lows

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Giora Schmidt

### By Heuwel Tircuit

Youthful talent should always be encouraged, but neither too aggressively nor too quickly. That soon became apparent last Thursday evening when the young violinist Giora Schmidt made his local debut in Herbst Theater. With a terrific technical command of the instrument, the 20-year-old Schmidt soared through repertory dragons with inspired bravura, but there were times when simpler pieces were offered with something suggesting indifference.

Handsomely supported by the pianism of Rohan de Silva, Schmidt opened his program with three Sonatas: Mozart's No. 25 in F major, K. 377; Brahms' No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 108; and the Debussy. Schmidt rounded off with three Spanish inspired smaller works: two of Sarasate's Spanish Dances — *Habanera*, Op. 21, No. 1 plus *Romanza Andaluza*, Op. 22, No. 1 — then Ravel's *Tzigane*. For an encore, Schmidt offered two terse, obscure and

frankly worthless Kreisler ditties: a kitsch Couperin "In the style of..." parody and *Pulcinella*.

On the positive side, the virtuoso Brahms Sonata was a thrill in all respects: stylish, passionate, technically on the mark and utterly convincing. The same came along with the two Sarasate pieces, which projected all the virtues in the Brahms performance, sauced with a pinch of Spanish spice that was perfect. These were confirmation of Schmidt's musicianship and prospects at full sail, music making in the grand tradition..This could be a major career, and deserves careful nurturing

## The down side

The other performances were — well, not good. The Mozart sounded just plain bored, the Debussy like a reading rather than a performance, and the Ravel disorganized. The long opening cadenza of the Ravel, for instance, is a slightly over-the-top study in gypsy schmaltz. Schmidt played in faster than I've ever heard it done, with little attention to phrasing and a lack of dynamic variety which suggested about as much sensuality as a tax form.

Debussy's Violin Sonata is admittedly a mine field of dangerous problems. It's short for a Sonata, and the lightest and last of the three he completed just before his death. (There were to be a set of six Sonatas: No. 4 for oboe, horn and harpsichord; No. 5 for clarinet, bassoon, trumpet and piano; No. 6 featuring solo piano with instruments.) The fact that the No. 3 is a kind of swan song and in G Minor belies the fact that it mostly sounds like music for the pantomime of a sad clown in white face. The Sonata needs beautiful playing laced with pixy charm and just a hint of sentimentality if it's to succeed.

Schmidt played all the notes. Give him that much credit. It's just that he seemed content with literalism of the sort one expects to hear in a music school practice room, where communication is rather beside the point. Considering the contrast between his full commitment to late Romantic repertoire of Brahms and Sarasate, Schmidt's seeming lack of empathy with the lighter elegance of Mozart and French music was troubling. It brought to mind that ugly word, immaturity.

## Prime partnering

Pianist de Silva was his usual professional self, one of today's outstanding recital partners. His adjustments to the various composers all scored bulls-eyes. He could glitter and tinkle for Debussy, or turn the piano's tone

into umber resonance for Brahms' thundering rushes up the keyboard.

This was the annual Gift Concert offered to San Francisco Performance's subscribers thanks to generous patrons George and Camilla Smith. The series offers local debuts to young talented artists who are emerging into their professional career, which is a noble as well as charming concept.

Schmidt is young and an undoubted talent of major promise. At his best, he played as well as any violinist I've heard. It's just that he lacked the consistency required to sustain a career. The problem would seem to suggest that it's a little too soon for him to be shoved onto the stage.

(Heuwell Tircuit, composer, performer and writer, was chief writer for Gramophone Japan and for 21 years a music reviewer for the SF Chronicle, previously for the Chicago American and Asahi Evening News.)

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