

# The Boston Musical Intelligencer

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## Schubert Best in Wispelwey Transcription Program

by CASHMAN KERR PRINCE

Under the auspices of Celebrity Series of Boston, cellist Pieter Wispelwey and pianist Paolo Giacometti presented the Aaron Richmond Recital in Jordan Hall last night. The program of romantic and modern music, most transcriptions for cello and piano, highlighted Wispelwey's formidable technical skills and Giacometti's nuanced and precise piano playing. Although Wispelwey was undoubtedly the main attraction of the evening, Giacometti is a fabulously sensitive pianist I hope to hear sometime soon in solo recital.

Artists used to program transcriptions with greater frequency, but that changed along with the rise of internationally renowned soloists and the proliferation of sound recordings. Except for the Crumb sonata, this was a recital of transcriptions, recalling recitals of yore. The program opened with the Johannes Brahms Violin Sonata no.1 in G, op. 78, "*Regen*," arranged in D for cello and piano. The transcription, once attributed to the composer, is known now to be the work of Paul Klengel; it was first published in 1897, the year of Brahms's death. Wispelwey and Giacometti gave a melancholic and subdued reading of this work, technically masterful and musically phrased. Performed mostly on the cello's upper two strings, the sonic world is far distant from that of the two Brahms cello sonatas: absent was the depth and richness of the cello's lower register, such a marked feature of Brahms's writing for the instrument. This arrangement calls for steady command of the absolute upper reaches of the cello, which Wispelwey amply demonstrated. I also found the change to the brighter (on the cello) key of D and the resulting change of timbre to be an obstacle in this piece.

The second work on the program was an unqualified success: the Franz Schubert Fantasy in C for violin and piano, D. 934 (op. posth. no. 159), arranged for cello and piano. The unattributed arrangement of this virtuosic showpiece, inspired by Schubert hearing Paganini perform in Vienna, is by Wispelwey himself. The work is technically challenging, but that did not stop him and Giacometti from having fun performing it. The shifts from legato lyricism to rapid passagework were all shaped into lovely musical phrases. This arrangement is a more successful transcription than the Brahms that opened the program; the Schubert highlighted the performers' technical prowess and musical strengths but also deployed the richness and wealth of cello and piano in a manner more respectful of each instrument's capacities.

Following intermission, Wispelwey returned to the stage for the George Crumb Sonata for Solo Cello (1955). This modernist work, marked by a recurring neo-romantic theme, fit nicely with the first half of the program; and the audience, despite some initial trepidation, embraced the music and the performance. Drawing on the cello's lower and middle range, the sonata requires some extended technique (notably left-hand pizzicato), as it presents both harmony and melody. Wispelwey articulated all voices well, warming to the *andante espressivo*, milking the *tema pastorale*, swelling in the *largo*, and sprinting in the *vivace* of the finale.

Giacometti returned to the stage for the Igor Stravinsky *Suite Italienne, after Pulcinella* (1934), arranged by the composer with the cellist Gregor Piatagorsky. This playful work recalls Boccherini's writing for the cello as it skips, traipses, dances around thematic ideas drawn from Pergolesi (or so Stravinsky thought; we now know many are of spurious authorship). *Spiccato* and *sautillé* bowing in the *Tarantella* and *Introduzione*, legato in the Aria, a Serenata in a Neapolitan vein: this *Suite Italienne* encapsulates in miniature the possible sound-worlds of a cello and served as a fitting summation to the formal program of this recital.

We were treated to two encores. In the Gabriel Fauré, *Après un rêve* (transcribed for cello and piano by Pablo Casals) we heard Wispelwey give throaty voice to lush and soaring lyricism, his smooth bow-changes sustaining this song. The final piece of the evening was the Frédéric Chopin, *Grande Valse Brillante in E-flat, op. 18* transcribed for cello and piano. The brilliant clarity of this final piece, beautifully realized, shone us out into the wintry night.

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