

Jay Harvey Upstage

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Some solo violin brilliance gives way to a nine-blossom bouquet in joint presentation of IVCI and Ronen Chamber Ensemble



Haoming Xie

A formidable 19th-century violinist who found time to compose prolifically provided a brilliant capstone to Tuesday's concert featuring Haoming Xie, a 2010 Laureate of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, in a co-presentation with the [Ronen Chamber Ensemble](#).

Louis Spohr's Nonet in F major, op. 31, had Xie in the principal chair for a four-movement piece offering continual interaction between his violin and the viola of Li Li, the cello of Andre Gaskins, the double bass of Ju-Fang Liu, the oboe of Jennifer Christen, the flute of Tamara Thweatt, the clarinet of David Bellman, the bassoon of Kelly Swensson, and the French horn of Darin Sorley.

That's about the largest feasible ensemble falling under the one-to-a-part rubric of chamber music. Spohr manages this combination with no hint of unwieldiness, except perhaps in the finale, where he turns aside from what sounds as if it will be a Beethovenesque coda and keeps on going. His feeling for Beethoven was oddly old-fashioned, favoring the titan's early stage, even though late in life Spohr embraced Richard Wagner's music. As a composer, he was stubborn in both taste and procedure, going his own way in a manner a little too dogged and unimaginative to assure his music of immortality.

Nonetheless, the Nonet is a delightful work that was played with admirable unanimity for a group necessarily unique for this occasion. Its abundant exchanges of motivic material have plenty of variety, sometimes opposing winds to strings, sometimes high to low registers. Like the other, relatively few pieces by Spohr I'm familiar with, the music is easy to follow at first hearing. In fact, you would almost welcome the opportunity to be brought up short or thrown momentarily. It doesn't happen.

For his resistance to the broader musical currents of his era, his craftsmanship, his fecundity, and his individuality, Spohr is kind of like a 19th-century Paul Hindemith — but with more charm. An expansive Scherzo in the Nonet, for instance, featured two highly characterized trios. The second of them, led by the woodwinds, had a fetching chromatic line that put color in the nonet's cheeks. The finale, whose phrases suggested the buoyancy of comic opera, or perhaps one of those perky ensembles for a corps de ballet, was delightful despite

its protracted search for an ending. When that arrived, it sounded predictably emphatic and foursquare. Like Hindemith, Spohr encourages no doubt that you're on solid ground.

The concert's first half included pianist Hyun Soo Kim, a colleague of Xie's at the Cleveland Institute of Music, as the violinist's partner. The duo played three chestnuts: Tchaikovsky's Valse-Scherzo, Chausson's Poeme, and Wieniawski's Polonaise de Concert. The Tchaikovsky curtain-raiser emerged none too promising at first: Xie's tone was somewhat dull, especially in double stops. Fortunately, it gained brilliance as it went along. The pair were fully in sync, flexible of tempo, throughout.

The high polish and glowing warmth of Xie's tone was evident in the Chausson, and stayed unflappable under the technical variety of the Wieniawski. Xie's harmonics were particularly secure and gleaming. A specialist in collaborative piano, Kim seemed especially supportive and inspired during this work.

Contrast in the midst of these offerings was provided by Khachaturian's Trio in G minor for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano. Ronen co-founder and artistic director Bellman joined Xie and Kim for the performance. Apart from a long, last note in the second movement hit below pitch, Xie's excellence was sustained, and coordination of the three instruments held steady.

The work blends suggestions of Armenian folk music with sophisticated impressionism (the latter being notable especially at the outset). Other aspects of modern French music, particularly the springy boulevard step of Poulenc, made faint but suggestive appearances, notably in the peppy Allegro movement in the middle.

It's always a pleasure to have the IVCI draw on its huge list of supremely capable violinists to enliven the Indianapolis concert season with its Laureate Series. And the pleasure was renewed Tuesday night at the Indiana History Center by Xie and his collaborators.