

Trivella Duo serves up a feast of American riches for Dranoff Foundation

By Lawrence Budmen, South Florida Classical Review



The Trivella Piano Duo performed Sunday night in Miami Beach. Photo: Mario Rota

Contemporary works for two pianos were on the musical agenda at the Trivella Piano Duo's recital for the Dranoff Foundation concert series Sunday at New World Center.

Two Dranoff commissions and four relatively new scores tested the considerable technical facility of Davide and Daniele Trivella, the Italian brothers who won the Gold Medal at the 1999 Dranoff Competition. A fine recent work by Lowell Liebermann joined scores by American icons John Corigliano and John Adams in taking top honors.

On the downside, count the Trivella's transcription of Italian composer Giovanni Sollima's *Violincelles, Vibrez!* (Cellos, Vibrate). The duo's dedication of their arrangement to the late Loretta Dranoff, founder of the foundation and two piano competition, was clearly heartfelt. Still the piece's initially catchy melody turns into soupy Italianized Rachmaninoff and the later prepared piano repetitive bass effects and jazzed-up version of the initial melody seem contrived.

Liebermann's *Sonata for Two Pianos* (2011) is one of his finest works. Opening with a soft, quasi-impressionistic *Lento*, the *Allegro moderato* that follows suggests Prokofiev in its repetitive, motoric rhythms. An abrupt ending leads to a solemn slow movement with melodic lines that mirror darkness. Rapid motifs clash against each other from the two keyboards in the finale with a touch of Gershwin adding pizzazz. Liebermann's splendidly crafted score displayed the Trivella's sensitive touch and astutely varied dynamics as well as their unison aplomb at the fastest speeds.

Corigliano's *Chiaroscuro*, commissioned for the 1997 Dranoff Competition, is a gem of concision and creative imagination. Corigliano directs that one piano be tuned a quarter tone down, producing eerie effects when the two pianos play simultaneously. (A specially tuned Steinway was brought on stage for the performance.) With spiky dissonances arising from the micro-tuning, the musical atmosphere would fit a science fiction film. Corigliano seems to resolve the musical ambiguity by quoting a Bach chorale but that spell is broken at the conclusion with harsh cluster chords. A terrific original vignette, Corigliano's work is a test of the pianists' strength and technique. The Trivellas splendidly encompassed the score's demands.

Adams' *Hallelujah Junction* is ebullient and sharp-edged, combining modernist and populist influences. Adams' signature minimalism is filtered through folk and pop music styles, the amplified pianos giving the score an edgier context. At times Adams has the pianists playing the same material slightly out of synch in the manner of Steve Reich. The duo reveled in this intensely rhythmic, propulsive score.

Gabriela Lena Frank's *Seis cantos de los campos* (a 2013 Dranoff commission) is a quintessential competition piece, testing the artists' speed, agility and reaction time. Frank's multicultural moods span six movements, ranging from ominous to jazzy with some modern Latin dance rhythms seasoned by spicy harmonics. Playful touches like the sudden glissando that ends the grand first movement continually intrude, adding wit to the musical stew.

Canadian composer Alice Ping Yee Ho's *Glistening Piano* opens with the players reciting lines from a Lord Byron poem "She walks in beauty, like the night..." while striking the strings of the piano. (At the composer's request, the Trivellas spoke the lines in their native Italian.) The work's second movement suggests its title with glistening cascades of sound, quiet moments igniting into full blast fortés. Bright hued melodic strands in fast succession conclude the delightful confection.

Daniele and Davide Trivella's own composition *Habibi (My Love)* was a charming encore. Romantic and lyrical, the piece brought out the duo's soft, elegant side.