

Artists' homecoming a triumph

By JOHN GUINN
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When it comes to home-grown musical talent, Detroit doesn't have to take a back seat to any place.

Take violist Kim Kashkashian and pianist James Tocco, who performed an immensely satisfying joint recital in Orchestra Hall Sunday as a benefit for the Institute of Music and Dance, an affiliate of the Center for Creative Studies.

Both musicians began their training in Detroit, and both have gone on to major international careers. And while Tocco pays regular, valuable visits to his hometown, Kashkashian visits less frequently.

Based on her playing Sunday night, she ought to come home more often.

In a way, playing the viola is like wearing hand-me-down clothes. The literature for the instrument is so scant that violists often end up playing transcriptions of music originally intended for other instruments.

That's what Kashkashian did Sunday night. She opened the program with Schubert's A-Minor Sonata, originally composed for the arpeggione, a six-stringed instrument invented in 1823. Today one hears this sonata most often performed on the cello.

The Schubert was followed by Bach's Second Suite for Unaccompanied Cello in a transcription for unaccompanied viola. Kashkashian's final piece, Brahms' E-flat Major Sonata, Op. 120, No. 2, while titled "for clarinet (or viola) and piano," is heard much more frequently with clarinet than with viola.

The reasons for the paucity of music for solo viola are many, and Kashkashian's playing proved conclusively that most of them are invalid. Had she played nothing but the 12 major scales, she would probably have made her point: The viola deserves a secure place in the ranks of distinguished solo instruments.

As it was, she made you believe, at least while she translated the notes of Schubert, Bach and Brahms into unerringly beautiful viola sound, that all three composers were actually thinking of her chosen instrument when they wrote these pieces. Had they been lucky enough to hear her play, they surely would have.

Kashkashian is a spontaneous artist, one whose playing is imbued with an absolutely natural feeling for musical sound. Her notes follow each other with such inevitability they cannot fail to coalesce into memorable musical ideas. No matter what instrument she played, she would be a composer's dream: a performer who transforms the notes on staff paper into the sounds he heard inside his head.

Her Schubert was unfailingly lyrical. Her Bach was blessedly free from the academic stuffiness that passes in some quarters as authentic. Her Brahms was expansive, big-boned and deeply etched.

Where was Tocco in all this? Giving, as he does each time he returns home, new evidence of the extent of his ability.

Have we known before this, for instance, that Tocco is a superb cham-



Kim Kashkashian



James Tocco

ber music player? We do now. He is a natural collaborator who matched his artistry so deftly with Kashkashian's that the combination provided fresh illumination of each of the scores.

Left to his own devices, he also delineated the considerable value of two Chopin works, the Berceuse and

the Barcarolle, that are usually thought of as some of the Polish master's lesser efforts.

You get the point. It was an evening when two hometown kids who have made it big showed us, conclusively, why. There's no musical experience quite like it.

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