

Kashkashian's Many Moods in Herbst Recital

By Robert Commanday
Chronicle Music Critic

Kim Kashkashian, a noted violist with a tone deep and dark as a forest lake, played impressively in recital at Herbst Theatre on Tuesday. She is one of a select few violists finding success as an independent artist, in solo and chamber music, and her playing explains that. She plays into the heart of the music, drawing in the listener so that he shares her commitment. It's profound musical and spiritual understanding that generates such playing, not mere energy and fervor.

In her pianist, Paul Hersh of San Francisco, she had a partner with the same completeness of dedication (that he has equally as a violist himself, but that wasn't his role Tuesday). Such quality led one to expect the program to be more satisfying than it was. The reason was repertory, or perhaps just the ordering of the selections, Hindemith's Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 25, No. 4, and the transcription of Falla's song cycle "Suite Populaire," better suited for the second half.

To start, in Schumann's "Märchenbilder," Op. 113, Kashkashian and Hersh caught the fantastic quality of the first study, viola and piano melody interlacing, and of the third, a stormy scherzo. The other two are song types, a march and a lyrical piece, melancholy, hauntingly played. Known for her performance of contemporary music, Kashkashian introduced one unusual work, Britten's "Lachrymae: Reflections on a Song of Dowland," Op. 48, in a most sensitive rendition. A somber lament, it is a kind of reverse set of variations, Dowland's tune, "Flow My Tears," and harmonization emerging only after a series of what seems to be free, almost improvisatory, little essays. The viola speaks in many different and unexpected voices and colors, the textures impressionistic, mood taking over for line. It was very delicately done, and at the last, Kashkashian playing the original song in the character of a 16th century instrument.

In Brahms' F minor Sonata, Op. 120, No. 1, the program's concluding work, Kashkashian and

Hersh had music that was ideal for them, for the lyricism that is impassioned and then gentle and songful, but also for the building of ideas into wonderful structures, and entailing a small amount of poetry.

Two works in the first half, better suited for the second, were Falla's Suite Populaire, a transcription of six songs, and Hindemith's Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 25, No. 4 (1922). Kashkashian played the Falla as if she were Marilyn Horne singing the originals, variously earthy, beautifully languorous ("Asturiana"), fiery in the flamenco manner, touching (the lullaby, "Nana") and flashy again. Hersh, playing with percussive abandon, had a great dance time in this, warming up for the driving

rhythmic accompaniments in the Hindemith.

This is early Hindemith that predates his neo-Baroque style and runs parallel with Bartok in that period. The sonata stresses persistently hammered ostinatos and other reiterated patterns, the harmonies austere and changing at a slow pace. The rhythmic impulse however is nowhere near as vital or highly charged. A distinguished violist himself, Hindemith wrote marvelously for the instrument and Kashkashian made the most of it. (She has recorded the Hindemith viola sonatas, an excellent album). All the same, in its ideas and substance, the work does not hold up today. She played one encore, an Armenian folk song, and it was lovely, touching.