

Review Conway Hall – Bachtrack – 2016

By Julian Hanck

Delta Piano Trio: virtuosity and elegance at Conway Hall

By [Julien Hanck](#), 05 December 2016

Regarded by fellow musicians as one of the most promising young ensembles, the [Delta Piano Trio](#) have made a name for themselves with their raw, uncompromising musicianship, their energy and a willingness to invest oneself beyond comfort. Their programme, though, was made for comfort, featuring two solid standards: [Mendelssohn's](#) exquisite [Piano trio no. 1 in D minor](#) and [Rachmaninov's](#) romantic '[Trio Élégiacque](#)'. Between these towering masterpieces, [Lera Auerbach's](#) First Piano Trio gave a tantalizing taste of Schnittkian insanity.

It was interesting to hear a less gushy and overblown interpretation of Rachmaninov's *G minor trio* than one normally encounters. Keeping composure is very important in this work, whose impact is dependent on retention and intensification effects. Yet the Delta Piano Trio managed to keep an iron grip on dynamics and tempo, without tangling up in rubatos. Gerard Spronk and Irene Enzlin were passionate, eluding wanton prettification. As for Vera Kooper, thoroughness and beauty of tone shone in equal measure throughout this 15 minute work. And this was just the opening number.

The Delta Piano Trio then gave a characterful, rhythmically buoyant account of [Haydn's E minor Trio](#) (HOB. XV:12). Though the instrument for which Haydn wrote his music differ in many respect from Conway Hall's lustrous Bösendorfer, Kooper managed to find the perfect key dip and lightness of touch, so that she did not overpower her partners. This went hand in hand with a playing style sharply contrasting with what we heard in Rachmaninov – none of the accursed chopping in which even distinguished pianist indulge; a neat and tinkling tone instead, along with insightful phrasing. Lowered dampers allowed her to achieve subtle effects without diminishing the clarity of the right hand, which was always perfectly steady. After a courteous *Andante*, the *Rondo* offered us an opportunity to admire both the Trio's technical skill and their flair for choosing a dramatised interpretation that avoided monotony.

Lera [Auerbach's](#) *Piano Trio no. 1* opened up a completely different soundworld. Unlike other contemporary composers, Auerbach enjoys the postmodern inalienable right to 'tonal' ventures, while indulging in a panoply of progressive effects (*sul ponticello*, even playing under the bridge). Yet, principles of climax and symmetry govern the overall structure in a well-balanced form.

The first movement, a short and swift *fughetta*, adopts short rhythmic patterns, all of which play with eerie overtones. Yet, it soon gives way to a sombre threnody, which throws the focus on the cello. The second movement fitted Irene Enzlin like a glove, showcasing her gorgeous legato and a *messa di voce* quality. Her bow technique was virtually flawless, she and Gerard Spronk sustained ravishing *quasi niente*, held for serenely long durations. As the piece progressed, the piano rippled along with strong inner tension, creating a feeling of imminence... which proved accurate as the third movement acquired a particularly aggressive edge: a finger-crushing *Presto*, whose spikiness and violent outbursts more than nodded towards Alfred Schnittke. Fistfuls of notes were employed along with outrageous syncopations effects, until the music felt like imploding upon itself.

Mendelssohn brought the audience back to more regularly charted waters. In spite of some faux-pas (of no consequence), Kooper exhibited virtuosity where it was called for, scaling back when necessary (for instance in the introductory bars of the *Molto allegro agitato*). She tackled the technical obstacles with great elegance, striking the keys with huddled fingers, without lifting up the hand too far, so as to ensure immediacy of sound. Spronk, however, achieved strength less

through lyricism than through the focus and sharpness of his tone. Whatever one's personal view of his highly subjective phrasing (he makes great use of Mutter-style *portato*), he certainly knows how to rivet his audience.

The *Andante con moto tranquillo* saw a return to light-hearted sweetness. Enzlin, in particular, was a wonder. Yet, both cellist and violinist impressed with beautifully burnished colours in their *mezzo pianos*, and dreamy dynamic swells. Boisterous expressionism was again to the fore in the *Finale*. Not a flawless performance (pitch and semiquavers sometimes struggled), but the drive was re-captured every time there was a full-voiced passages, many of which were vertiginous. And yet, after nearly two hours of intense playing, the three musician looked as if they could start afresh all over again.

LINK: <https://bachtrack.com/review-auerbach-enzlin-spronk-kooper-delta-piano-trio-conway-london-december-2016>