Duo pianists offer accessible contemporary program

BY LAWRENCE BUDMEN
SOUTH FLORIDA CLASSICAL REVIEW

The formidable technical arsenal and musicality of sisters Yuka and Ayaka Yamamoto was on display in a program of contemporary duo piano scores presented by the Dranoff International 2 Piano Foundation at the New World Center in Miami Beach.

Performing as Duo Yamamoto, the pair took the top prize at last year’s Dranoff competition. Though Wednesday night’s concert was titled “21st Century Classical,” two of the five works date from the last 15 years of the previous century. Two were commissioned for Dranoff competitions, and all five displayed the accessible, audience-friendly side of modern composition.

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Duo Yamamoto offers an easily digestible contemporary program

By Lawrence Budmen

Duo Yamamoto, 2013 Murray Dranoff 2 Piano Competition winner, performed Wednesday night at New World Center.

Duo Yamamoto, First Prize winners of the 2013 Murray Dranoff International 2 Piano Competition, returned to South Florida on Wednesday night for a program of contemporary duo piano scores, presented by the Dranoff Foundation at the New World Center in Miami Beach. The concert's title “21st Century Classical” was somewhat misleading since two of the five works that were performed date from the last fifteen years of the previous century. All of the music displayed the sisters Yuka and Ayaka Yamamoto’s formidable technical arsenal and musicality.
Two of the works on the program were commissioned for the Dranoff competitions. All five scores displayed the accessible, audience-friendly side of modern composition and none represented that better than William Bolcom’s *Recuerdos*. One of the late Loretta Dranoff’s early commissions for the 1991 competition, the three-movement suite is vintage Bolcom, infusing classical idioms with elements of popular culture. Escowhewing speed or overt pyrotechnical display, the Yamamoto sisters brought lightness and finely varied dynamic gradations to Bolcom’s tributes to Ernesto Nazareth and Louis Moreau Gottschalk. The duo’s relaxed tempos and delicate touch displayed the music’s charm and sly humor.

Robert Xavier Rodriguez is a master of the pastiche. The Texas based composer’s one-act satirical opera *Tango*, presented as part of a double bill last season by Florida Grand Opera, fused melodies by Beethoven and Mozart with Latin rhythms.

In a similar manner Rodriguez’s *Bachanale*, a 1999 Dranoff commission, mixes swirling dance melodies with direct quotations from J.S. Bach works for solo cello and viola da gamba. A combination of balletic verse and echoes of the Baroque, Rodriguez’s entertaining piece displayed the duo’s pinpoint coordination and fleet virtuosity.

University of Miami Frost School of Music Dean Shelly Berg’s *Martha and Mary Meditation* (2011) is an alternately moody and playful rumination on the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke with a slight touch of Berg’s jazz roots. Ostensibly based on the Emily Dickinson poem “Have you got a brook in your little heart,” Canadian composer Alice Ping Yee Ho’s *Heart to Heart* (2011) is unabashedly romantic music. With its tolling bells and sweeping themes, the score suggests a twenty-first century update of Rachmaninoff with some repetitive minimalism added for seasoning. Slickly crafted with the virtue of brevity, this vignette could become an effective encore piece.

Japanese composer Takashi Yoshimatsu’s *Random Bird Variations* was the closest the program came to offering a challenging work. Small melodic cells flow through the 1985 set of eight variations on an original theme. Repeated tinkles and arpeggios and cluster chords recall Ligeti’s solo keyboard pieces without the Hungarian composer’s originality or substance. The work is a test of the players’ technique and the Yamamoto duo’s impressive chops and digital dexterity came to the fore.

While the scheduled 2013 Dranoff commission *Seis Cantos de los Campos* by Gabriela Lena Frank was dropped from the program, the suite’s final movement, “Danza del Pueblo,” was offered as an encore, a whirlwind exhibition of speed and rhythmic propulsion.

**The Dranoff Foundation concert series continues 8 p.m. April 19 at the South Dade Cultural Center with Jazz Squared featuring duo pianists Saar Ahuvia and Stephanie Ho playing works by Gershwin, Bernstein and Chick Corea.**

[dranoff2piano.org](http://dranoff2piano.org); 305-572-8900

**The Saint Martha-Yamaha concert series presents Duo Yamamoto and the Stenzl Brothers Duo 3 p.m. March 2.**

[saintmartha.tix.com](http://saintmartha.tix.com); 800-595-4849

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