

Duo d'Accord brings theatrical passion to wide-ranging program

By Dave Rosenbaum

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Duo d'Accord performed Tuesday night at Coral Gables Congregational Church.

Duo d'Accord means to be seen as well as heard. The piano team of Lucia Huang and Sebastian Euler was part music and part theatrical in their concert Tuesday night at Coral Gables Congregational Church, presented by the Dranoff 2 Piano Foundation.

The married pianists express their emotional playing in grand statements and gestures—waving arms and hands, dipping and swaying torsos and dramatic facial expressions. Fortunately, Huang and Euler, winners of the 2001 Dranoff 2Piano Competition, were far more successful on the musical side of things in a wide-ranging, crowd-pleasing performance.

Musically, they squeeze every drop of passion from the adagios and melodic passages. They also bang out the fortissimos, and while the playing can be white-knuckle exciting, lack of subtlety seems their favored interpretative choice.

Yet they were clearly capable of applying a delicate music touch, as in the world premiere of Keiko Fujiie's *Beyond A Paperlike Thin Shield*, which the Japanese composer dedicated to Duo d'Accord. Euler, speaking in German from the stage (and interpreted by Dranoff music director Erik Ochsner), noted that Fujiie describes her brief work as representing “the sensation of expecting something wonderful...We can almost touch it but not yet.” Sitting side-by-side at one piano, Euler and Huang played with their arms crossed over and underneath each other. The sound they produced was transparent, like water gently flowing, the effect gorgeous.

This contrasted greatly with the athleticism they displayed in the opening work, Mozart's Sonata in D Major for four hands, composed for performances with his sister. The spirited opening movement, taken at an especially brisk pace by Huang and Euler, and the even faster third movement gave them the chance to show off their technical dexterity and crystalline sound.

In the first movement of Bach's Concerto in C Minor for two harpsichords, Euler and Huang, at facing pianos, agilely



played a game of varying tempos. They made the adagio sound like a love duet, the playing tender and warm. Huang and Euler impressively captured the lines and character of the harpsichord's sound in the snappy third movement.

They switched pianos for *Lilliburlero Variations*, a 2008 Dranoff commission by British composer Richard Rodney Bennett. Bennett wrote for film and TV, and the ten-minute work has a movie-like feel, reflected in Huang's melodramatic facial expressions. The playing was consistently spirited and entertaining, but one wished Euler and Huang would have had more trust in the score rather than the theatrical presentation.

Euler and Huang opened the second half of the program with their own arrangement of four excerpts from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. It's a successful arrangement, and the orchestra's absence was never missed as Duo d'Accord created an impressive wall of sound in the dark, pulsating "Dance of the Knights." In the finale, "Mercutio," Huang and Euler exchanged solos while the

other played hard percussion on the piano lid and bench.

Franz Liszt's *Reminiscences de Don Juan* for two pianos is one of the most challenging pieces in the piano repertoire and a thrill ride in the middle portions. This highlight reel from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* features the graveyard scene, Don Juan's duet with Zerlina, the Champagne aria, the Commendatore's threat and a surprise upbeat ending.

Duo d'Accord attacked the roiling opening passages with a dramatic surge and made the love duet feel truly operatic. The coda was thunderous, perhaps excessively so. There was nothing subtle about the playing, but Huang and Euler captured the spirit of Mozart's opera.

The generous encore, a duo arrangement of *Tangata* by Astor Piazzolla, displayed the pianists' distinct artistic natures with Huang boldly expressive and Euler more restrained.

Dranoff 2 Piano presents "Piano Slam" 7:30 p.m. April 13 at the Arsht Center. dranoff2piano.org (<http://dranoff2piano.org/>).

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