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Notes from The Romantic Heartland

New York

Isaac Stern Auditorium, Carnegie Hall

04/24/2024 -

**Richard Wagner: *Prelude to Lohengrin; Overture to Tannhäuser; Johannes Brahms; Symphony Number 3; Robert Schumann: Piano Concerto***

Hélène Grimaud (Pianist), Jakub Hruša (Chief Conductor),  
Bamberg Symphony



J.Hruša(©IMG Artists)

*"To this day Schumann remains one of my closest 'friends'. To me, this is one of the most extraordinary of all concertos. It's unique, intuitive and extremely fragile. There's nothing square or predictable about it. I've often said that in an ideal world a concerto should be like chamber music on a large scale. But with Schumann, this is a matter of life or death: if it's not like chamber music, then it does not work. That is the only way it comes to life."*

Hélène Grimaud on the Schumann *Piano Concerto*

The young Jacob Hruša and his 68-year-old Bamberg Symphony seemed a perfect fit last night at their Carnegie hall debut. The Czech conductor chose three composers who knew each other (even with contempt or adulterous episodes), whose music brimmed over with Romantic

excesses and for whom the Czech-German orchestra well understoodl.

On an especially nice note, both Bamberg Orchestra and soloist Grimaud give special import to environmental issues. The Bamberg group, when traveling, optimize schedules to minimize carbon emissions, and give financial support to a group involved in removing carbon “through the natural pathways of the ocean.”

Ms. Grimaud’s contribution is described below.

For the first of two Wagner opera-openings, Mr. Hruša chose *Lohengrin*, a simple arch form where the two meditations surrounded an arch of a chorale. Hardly one of Wagner’s later better ones, but the conductor played with enough spiritual content.

To show the Bamberg as its best, the Brahms *Third Symphony* waws a model. Like the orchestra (and much like Czech temperament itself) this was elegiac, cussing on the pastoral but always with those restrained melodic lines.

Mr. Hruša was flexible in the opening, never too loud (many conductors take the opening *forte* close to *fortissimo*), retaining the orchestra to emphasise the dark colors. The two slower movements showed the lovely woodwind solos. And the finale? Mr. Hruša could have rushed through the volatile passages. Instead, again, his temperament and wonderful sense of structure adhered all the changes, making for a relatively monumental ending.



H.Grimaud and Friend(©Getty Images)

The names “Grimaud” and “Wolf” have been intimately linked for a quarter century. Not *Hugo* Wolf but *Canis Lupus*. When not on her keyboard, Ms. Grimaud is in upstate New York with the Wolf Conservation Center which she founded 25 years ago. Undoubtedly, her delicacy, her sensitivity, and above all, her *empathy* for notes and animal are predominant.

It was also typical Grimaud for the first two movements of

the Schumann *Piano Concerto* And strangely a *literal* translation of Schumann's enigmatic direction *Allegro affetuoso*. Ms. segregated each. For those quick passages, starting with the first measures, she ran her fingers over the keys with feather-light energy. For the slower "tender" moments, she almost vocally breathed over each measure. Retards are hardly forbidden in her vocabulary.

The *Intermezzo* was played with equal skill and affection and warmth, again making this totally personal. Only in the last movement did she surrender love for a jumping, rollicking joyride over the keys, with Mr. Hruska urging his orchestra to keep up with her.

The Steinway rolled away, the Bamberg Orchestra finished with as exciting a *Tannhäuser* overture as I could remember. The spiritual, the lyrical, and above all, the martial brass paraded a triumphal ending to an always fascinating concert.

Harry Rolnick



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