

# Claremont Trio mixes in some fun for Concert at the Point

## Sunday

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By Keith Powers, Contributing Writer

Hopscotch and robots added humor and personality to the Claremont Trio's recital recently in the Westport Point United Methodist Church.

Making their fifth appearance for Concerts at the Point, Claremont performed works by Smetana, Beethoven and Sean Shepherd before a sold-out audience.

Hopscotch? Robots? We'll get to that.

The trio — Emily (violin) and Julia (cello) Bruskin, with Andrea Lam (piano) — impossibly approaching their 20th anniversary, dove right in to Smetana's only trio, in G minor. Dedicated in 1855 to the composer's oldest daughter, who had died at four of scarlet fever, one would expect the work to be unrelentingly bleak.

It does have some characteristics of a memorial — especially how the primary melody in the final movement Rondo suddenly slows down and turns into a funeral march — but this work just as often veers from mournful to ecstatic.

The first movement is bold, openly displaying its anguish but seeming to shift emotionally from measure to measure. The Scherzo, a searching rather than comic movement, unusually has two middle section trios, both tuneful, heartfelt.

The finale recalls Schubert's famous song "Der Erlkönig," which depicts a father on horseback, his son behind him in the saddle, trying to outpace death. That resonance, which would have been devastatingly sad to audiences in Smetana's time, still evokes powerful emotions more than a

century and a half later.

The playing was superb. Vastly talented even in their first years, Claremont now performs with the ease of an ensemble that knows each other's every move. Lam especially sounded confident, polished and authoritative.

Now for the hopscotch.

Young American composer Sean Shepherd's Trio was commissioned by Claremont for the historic opening of the new Calderwood Concert Hall at the Gardner Museum in Boston. Since then (2012), Claremont has championed the work, and performed it here with style and not a little wit.

The first movement, Florid Hopscotch, works like this. A sequence of short musical episodes begins with the piano landing one-footed on a gesture; the strings then hop two-legged to the next gesture. Then the piano again, then the strings, and so on.

The gestures are never the same, but continue in the one-then-two manner throughout the movement. It's a clever way to create the visual analogy of the musical structure.

The middle movement, Calderwood, mimics the room's square, four-story height, with the melodies — articulated in a cello solo, and then a violin solo — rising in a circular, smoke-like pattern. The finale — Slow Waltz of the Robots — creates humor from the imagined herky-jerky motion it evokes.

There is nothing terribly challenging about this music, but on this program, and in the hands of these artists, Shepherd's Trio sounded perfectly appropriate.

Beethoven's Archduke trio, his last, and the last work he ever performed before deafness robbed him of his virtuosity, filled the second half of the program. Broad in its inventions, and the development of those ideas, the trio makes many demands on the players.

Here, the elegant third movement, with its chorale-like theme and four variations, stood out for clarity. The bold attack to the finale sent a bolt of shock through the audience.

Some passages with rhythmic complexity — there are many — could have been articulated more clearly. But overall, this performance matched the music: confident, ambitious, intense.

The next program at Concerts at the Point will be the Handel & Haydn Society on Sunday, March 26 at 3 p.m. at Westport Point United Methodist Church. For information and tickets visit [www.concertsatthepoint.org](http://www.concertsatthepoint.org) or call 508-636-0698.

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