

## **Review: Varied pieces, virtuosic playing at 29th Kingston Chamber Festival**

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**By Keith Powers / Special to The Journal**

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With a blast of energy, provided by terrific players drawn from premiere orchestras and ensembles, the 29th Kingston Chamber Music Festival opened Wednesday evening at URI's Fine Arts Center.

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Four distinct works with a range of styles and configurations required virtuosic attention—and each got it. The program opened with an early work from Schubert, the Adagio and Rondo concertante for piano quartet.

Taking advantage of a dominant piano part, Hanchien Lee, who will be featured in a solo recital on July 22, didn't waste the opportunity. Her playing was alert and tasteful.

The Poulenc oboe sonata, played by James Austen Smith (oboe) and Jeewon Park (piano), proved a first-half highlight. With three sophisticated, dramatic movements, the sonata covers much emotional territory in a mere 15 minutes.

Dedicated to Sergei Prokofiev, the sonata generously cites his ballet "Romeo and Juliet," especially in the trio section of the scherzo. But the language is real Poulenc—demanding, but tuneful; challenging, but hardly drawing attention to its virtuosity.

The opening, an elegy, stays in a minor-key mood with a deliberate tempo. The scherzo interrupts its lively opening and closing section with a deeply felt trio.

Smith played terrifically, and truly shone in the finale, which demands that the oboe play in its highest and lowest registers. The movement is marked "Lament," but its calmness shows both mourning and respect as well.

Sarasate's "Navarra" offered some frisky, virtuosic fun to close the first half. It's based on a jota rhythm—think dancers with castanets.

Violinists Zachary DePue and Kyu-Young Kim jumped into the showpiece, which has tricks ranging from double-stops to left-hand pizzicato. But its most challenging parts were the unison playing, with Kim and DePue imitating each other flawlessly.

The first of Brahms' two string quartets, the F major, closed the program. Kim was joined by violinist Martin Beaver, violists Che-Hung Chen and Anna Marie Petersen, with cellist Kenneth Olsen, rounding out the ensemble.

A noble work, the quintet's centerpiece is its middle section, a double theme-and-variations. It serves simultaneously as a slow movement and a scherzo. In doing so, Brahms re-uses two of his own earlier melodies: a stately saraband, and a more lively gavotte.

The saraband gets introduced first, unison in all five voices. In a striking gesture, the second violin (Kim) hints at the gavotte partway through this opening statement. The slow melody and the vigorous one alternate, slightly varied, throughout the movement, with the saraband getting the final word.

An energetic conclusion wrapped up the work in upbeat fashion. The playing throughout — especially Chen's viola parts — was lively and engaged.

The Kingston Chamber Music Festival runs July 19 through 30 at the URI Fine Arts Center, Upper College Road, Kingston. The July 22 concert is at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 383 Old North Rd., Kingston. Tickets are \$25 (\$30 for church concert). Call (401) 874-2106 or visit [kingstonchambermusic.org](http://kingstonchambermusic.org).

*Keith Powers covers music and the arts for the GateHouse papers and WBUR's The ARTery. On Twitter at [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith).*

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