

JCT

JUNCTION TRIO

Stefan Jackiw | Conrad Tao | Jay Campbell

"Watching the trio perform, one really couldn't tell who was happier to be there — the rapt audience or the musicians, who threw themselves into repertoire they clearly love. ...

These three are onto something special."

— *Aspen Times*

**Junction Trio**  
**2024-2025 Biography**  
**Stefan Jackiw (violin); Jay Campbell (cello); Conrad Tao (piano)**

Three visionary artists combine internationally recognized talents in the eclectic ensemble, Junction Trio. Since their formation in 2015, the Trio have performed at Washington Performing Arts, Royal Conservatory in Toronto, Newport Classical, the Aspen Music Festival and for the LA Philharmonic's NowRising Series at The Ford Theater. Known for their unique program combinations and vibrant performances, they bring a fresh approach to the repertoire, dazzling audiences with their virtuosity and unity. "Watching the trio perform, one really couldn't tell who was happier to be there — the rapt audience or the musicians, who threw themselves into repertoire they clearly love...These three are onto something special." (*Boston Globe*)

In the 2024-2025 season, the Junction Trio make their debut at the 92nd Street Y, New York, performing trios by Shostakovich and Brahms as well as the world premiere of a new work by John Zorn. They also perform on the Peggy Rockefeller Series at New York's Rockefeller University. The Trio made their Carnegie Hall debut last season with the New York premiere of Zorn's *Philosophical Investigations*, performed alongside Ives's Piano Trio and Beethoven's "Archduke" Piano Trio.

Other recent highlights include the premiere of composer Amy Williams's work *Bells and Whistles* at the Celebrity Series of Boston and Friends of Chamber Music Denver. Since their formation, the Junction Trio have appeared with the Chamber Music Series of Tulsa, Pittsburgh, Albuquerque, and Detroit; Rockport Music Festival, the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., People's Symphony Concerts in New York City, Cliburn Concerts, Shriver Hall, Duke Performances, Caramoor, Stanford Live!, and the La Jolla Music Society, among many others.

In 2021, the Junction Trio were selected by New York's classical music radio station, WQXR, to be part of their inaugural Artist Propulsion Lab, which allowed them to engage collaborators, tap into new audiences through on-air curation opportunities and commission works.

*The New York Times* has praised the individual musicians of the Junction Trio, comprising the "brilliant young violinist" Stefan Jackiw, the "electrifying" cellist Jay Campbell,

and pianist and composer Conrad Tao, a musician of “probing intellect and open-hearted vision.” Together, writes the *Boston Music Intelligencer*, “This top-notch trio stands at the top of its game.”

"Bracing technique and jaw-dropping precision... A sense of unity, especially in dynamics and rhythmic thrust, made the Ravel Trio come together impressively." — *Aspen Times*

"I don't expect to hear anything more exciting this summer than the Junction Trio's astounding interpretation, especially the second movement which left me giggling with joy. The third movement sounded simply glorious—so evocative that it seemed these players had the power to change the weather; suddenly the sun started peeking through after a long spell of rain. There is nothing like hearing — and seeing — electrifying performers work their magic live. This top-notch trio stands at the top of its game. They made this treacherously difficult music sound entirely natural and fun, while still inspiring awe." — *Boston Musical Intelligencer*

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## Junction Trio

### Critical Acclaim



“Watching the trio perform, one really couldn’t tell who was happier to be there — the rapt audience or the musicians, who threw themselves into repertoire they clearly love. ... These three are onto something special.”

*Boston Globe*

“The most vibrant music so often takes place at the point where cultures meet, eras overlap, sensibilities intersect, and traditions fork. That in-between space is also the habitat of the aptly named Junction Trio, three stupendous musicians who glory in artistic instability, the sense that styles are not pure or settled practices and never were.”

*New York Magazine*

"I don't expect to hear anything more exciting this summer than the JCT Trio's astounding interpretation, especially the second movement which left me giggling with joy. The third movement sounded simply glorious—so evocative that it seemed these players had the power to change the weather; suddenly the sun started peeking through after a long spell of rain. There is nothing like hearing — and seeing — electrifying performers work their magic live. This top-notch trio stands at the top of its game. They made this treacherously difficult music sound entirely natural and fun, while still inspiring awe."

*Boston Musical Intelligencer*

“This young, superstar trio is capable of being as cool as it is fiery, and the performers’ strengths bring out the best in each other.”

*Arts Fuse*

"Bracing technique and jaw-dropping precision... A sense of unity, especially in dynamics and rhythmic thrust, made the Ravel Trio come together impressively."

*Aspen Times*

“The ensemble performed with a manic drive, sailing through the note-spattered pages and rhythmic complexities with apparent ease.”

*Bachtrack*

“They are new, they are exciting when they play together, and they are going places.”

*Lincoln Journal Star*

# JCT

NEW YORK

# VULTURE

May 6, 2024

## The Junction Trio Brings a Little Unruliness Back to Carnegie Hall

By Justin Davidson



The most vibrant music so often takes place at the point where cultures meet, eras overlap, sensibilities intersect, and traditions fork. That in-between space is also the habitat of the aptly named Junction Trio, three stupendous musicians who glory in artistic instability, the sense that styles are not pure or settled practices and never were. John Zorn's *Philosophical Investigations*, Charles Ives's Piano Trio, and Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio were composed near the start of three centuries on two continents by artistically fearless men with unruly imaginations and a penchant for making

a lot of intricate noise. They found kindred spirits in three musicians who are at an age to have accumulated decades of experience but not of rote repetition. Violinist Stefan Jackiw has performed all of Ives's violin sonatas with Jeremy Denk, cellist Jay Campbell is also a member of the tirelessly self-challenging JACK Quartet, and pianist (and composer) Conrad Tao has fashioned an elegantly idiosyncratic career. The Junction Trio made its Carnegie Hall debut in Weill Hall last week, and while the intimate recital room is the ideal chamber-music receptacle, it's probably already too



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small to contain the group's expanding reputation.

Each member brings his separate passions. Campbell has a close relationship with Zorn, who works like a kind of compositional collagist, slicing whatever music crosses his path into strips, then gluing them together into sequences that are both familiar and jubilantly disjunct. There's nothing contemplative about *Philosophical Investigations*, or rather it emulates the experience of watching the city swarm from a bench on a Broadway median: anger bumping into laughter, languages briefly intertwining, a hectic sequence of sprints, strides, and close encounters. I couldn't always follow the logic in the music's swerves or a reason for its violent spasms, but the musicians played the piece with such fervent clarity that it seemed self-explanatory at the time.

The concert's highlight was the Ives Trio, a young man's work so exuberantly original and ahead of its time that it must have made no sense at all even when he finally stopped tinkering with it around 1915. Ives wove popular and traditional tunes through the score, so that listeners, if there were any, would

latch on to scraps of "Marching Through Georgia," "My Old Kentucky Home," and "Pig Town Fling." Distance helps. The tunes have a cozy, antique quality now, and in any case the work's greatness has nothing to do with a menu of sampled excerpts. Instead, it lies in the vigor and finesse with which Ives mingled small-town nostalgia and urban energy, New England landscape and the constant buzz of nonconformity—qualities that the musicians tended to in every downbeat and syncopation.

What Ives, Zorn, Beethoven, and the Junction Trio all share is an exciting, spongelike irreverence. The world is made of music, and we don't select most of what we hear any more than we choose what molecules to breathe. Much of the classical-music world, with its history of soundproofed halls and hissless recordings, has organized itself around denying that vital cacophony. In our own time, ubiquitous ear pods isolate people in their own sonic bubbles. But this concert, even in the noiseless cocoon of Weill Hall, evoked the timeless jangle of public life, a culture enriched by constant collisions and relentless curiosity.



# the Strad

October 30, 2024

## **Brahms, Shostakovich and John Zorn: the Junction Trio debuts at the 92nd St Y**

US correspondent Thomas May speaks with violinist Stefan Jackiw and cellist Jay Campbell of the Junction Trio about their upcoming programme at the 92nd St Y, where they will give the world premiere of a new work John Zorn has written for them, alongside music by Brahms and Shostakovich.

Nearly a decade ago, violinist Stefan Jackiw, cellist Jay Campbell and pianist Conrad Tao decided to form the [Junction Trio](#). Each has appeared separately at the 92nd Street Y Center for Culture & Arts in Manhattan, but on 1 November the supergroup makes its anticipated debut there with a [programme](#) combining two of the greatest works of the piano trio literature – the Brahms B major and Shostakovich's Piano Trio No.2 – with the world premiere of [John Zorn's Philosophical Investigations II](#).

In their solo careers, all three are highly distinguished, sought-after musicians, yet they carve out time each season to tour with two or three programmes as the Junction Trio. The 92nd St Y appearance, though, is a special one-off event that is not part of a tour. How do they find time amid their crammed schedules to perform (let alone rehearse) together? 'A lot of things about this lifestyle are challenging, but you have to make time for the ones that are important', responds Campbell. 'My approach is to treat it like it's a relationship'.

Just ahead of their fall concert, Jackiw and Campbell met by Zoom to talk about

their collaboration with John Zorn, the connections between his new piece and the Brahms Trio in B major and what performing in a trio of musical friends means for them.

**What initially brought you together to start performing as a trio in 2015?**

Stefan Jackiw: I played with Jay on a chamber music tour of South Korea where we did the Schubert Cello Quintet. I had never heard the cello played so beautifully before in my life. Chamber music was, up to that point, just something I did at summer festivals with ad hoc groups. I began thinking that maybe a piano trio can survive as a part-time group. With string quartets, that's hard to do. So at the end of the tour, I said: let's find a pianist make a trio out of it. Neither of us had met Conrad Tao at that point, but we left him a Facebook message and later met up at his apartment and through Mendelssohn and Mozart trios.

**Jay, from your perspective playing with the JACK Quartet, what is it like to switch gears to play in a piano trio?**

Jay Campbell: It's a different way of working that's really refreshing. String



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quartets tend to gravitate towards this hyper hive-mind approach, often merging into a singularity. What's really distinctive about the piano trio is that the nature and esthetic of the ensemble itself are very individualistic. So it's really like a different instrument – a different way of approaching playing and interacting with other people. The inherent differences between two string players and a nine-foot piano are also interesting to navigate.

**This programme promises an intriguing dialogue between something brand new and familiar repertoire. How did you arrive at that balance?**

Jay Campbell: We had been talking for a while about playing the First Trio of Brahms. It's such a centrepiece of the repertoire yet we hadn't had a chance to do it yet. So it happened that a previous commission we did by John Zorn [*Philosophical Investigations I*] ends on this beautiful B major chord. When we were rehearsing it with Zorn, Conrad or Stefan went straight into the Brahms Trio as a joke. Zorn thought that was hilarious and started maniacally cracking up, as he often does. And then *Philosophical Investigations II* showed up in our inboxes, containing lots of quotes from the Brahms.

Stefan Jackiw: The Brahms is so rich and generous and also sprawling in its way, and the Zorn is incredibly dense, though it's not very long. We felt that maybe a slightly more compact first half might balance that meaty second half. The Brahms and the Shostakovich Second Piano Trio could not be more different sonically and emotionally. The Brahms is so lush and warm, while the Shostakovich is chilly and sparse – and terrifying. I guess the Zorn piece has both those elements. So we realised it could be a bridge between the Shostakovich and the Brahms.

**Jay, you have a long-lasting connection with John Zorn: he's written more than a dozen works for you, and the first *Philosophical Investigations* was included on another significant Junction Trio concert, at your [Carnegie Hall debut](#) this past spring. What do you enjoy most about collaborating with him?**

Jay Campbell: John doesn't take financial compensation for his pieces, which is a really interesting model. When we commission pieces for the JACK Quartet, often it doesn't get written until three or four years later, because there's a whole process of finding the money and finding a presenter who wants to do it. Sometimes it feels like whatever spark of inspiration there was at the moment of commissioning a piece is already gone. With John Zorn, you can bring up an idea, and then a week later, a piece lands in your inbox – it's so immediate.

And John always thinks about writing for people, not instruments, and takes into consideration the personality of the players. He has written a lot of pieces for me or for ensembles that I'm in, so he knows my playing well and knows where to challenge me. Every single piece of his has new challenges that push my playing – often in directions that I didn't think were possible. It almost feels like he knows my playing better than I do. It's really fun to grow into a piece, especially when it's written for you.

**What's an example in the new piece of pushing you in an unexpected direction?**

Jay Campbell: He goes very far in the direction of single-voice counterpoint, where it sounds like I'm playing 12 different instruments at the same time. My cello part looks like a piano part where there are two lines that are extremely jumpy.

**Stefan, what's your take on the new piece?**

Stefan Jackiw: Zorn's music has a reputation for being very dense and thorny, but it's actually highly lyrical. There are moments of almost Italian, bel canto textures. They get juxtaposed with incredibly kinetic, thorny stuff, where there's a bajillion things happening at once. Suddenly there will be a clearing and then a soaring melody with a clear, accompanimental line.

There are some moments where I have not yet figured out whether they're actually playable at the tempo he indicates. But that sort of near-impossibility is part of the aesthetic. There's a kind of manic scramble that is such a signature Zorn texture. It's incredibly exciting to listen to onstage, to see and hear the instrumentalists



pushed to their absolute limits there. We haven't yet put it together. It's going to sound crazy and exciting and harrowing, amid all these warm, lush Brahms quotations.

**Do you think it might even lead to another [broken-bow incident](#)?**

Stefan Jackiw: [laughing] And I wasn't even playing a crazy aggressive piece! That was [the UK premiere of] Reinhold Glière's Violin Concerto, and my bow snapped in half. I guess that's why no one plays that piece.

**Incidentally, what was the diagnosis? Is your 19th-century Parisian bow back to full health?**

Stefan Jackiw: Yes. As soon as I walked offstage, I took a photo of it and sent it to my bow guy in New York and asked: is this fixable? And he texted back: in four days. Though with a huge dip in value.

**Back to Zorn: he refers to the 20th-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein by titling the piece *Philosophical***

***Investigations*. What does that connection to Wittgenstein and his language games mean for you musically?**

Jay Campbell: I think one of the trademarks of Zorn's music is that it's speaking multiple languages all the time. I just played at a [40th-anniversary concert](#) of Zorn's *Cobra* at Roulette, which is a 'game piece' for genres for improvising musicians and a flexible ensemble. Zorn really enjoys this kind of multi-stylistic chaos. It's like a kind of channel surfing.

**How about the Brahms B major Trio, which you're finally performing together for the first time. What's so special for you about this piece?**

Jay Campbell: An alluring part of the Brahms trios overall for me is that they have parts I find mysterious and don't really understand, and that makes me want to dig into them. For example, the opening of the B major Trio suggests that the whole piece will be easy and

obvious, and then it goes in such challenging other directions. I can't make heads or tails of how it culminates in the last movement.

Stefan Jackiw: That's interesting that you say the opening suggests that the entire piece is going to have this sort of easy sunniness to it. That reminds me of the way the First Violin Sonata starts, which is the easiest melody to love – and then the piece veers off into this heartbreaking nostalgia. And the last movement is like an enigma that is very hard to grasp. But it's one of my desert-island masterpieces. I feel sort of the same way about the B major Trio. The opening is so undeniable and then goes into this weird counterpoint. The last movement is also satisfying but sometimes is not what you expect from such a lush opening in the first movement. So hopefully we'll be able to solve that!

**What are some future projects you'd like to do as the Junction Trio?**

Stefan Jackiw: A dream of mine is to have a triple concerto written for us. Another thing that we do now and then as a trio is to play the Beethoven Triple Concerto with orchestras. We're doing that again next season.

Jay Campbell: I would love to rehabilitate the reputation of the Triple Concerto. People will say it's a bad piece, but I don't buy that at all. Maybe it's not the Fifth Symphony, but it is a really great piece. It's so triumphant and fun and it traverses a huge range.

In the longer-term picture, I'd love to experiment with playing with fortepiano and different kind of historical instruments to see what that does to interpretations. I had a great experience playing some of the Beethoven cello sonatas with fortepiano. It feels like you're playing a different piece in a way. I would learn a lot about the pieces that I'm playing by changing the instruments that we play them on.

November 4, 2024

## A remarkable week of chamber music in New York City

By Edward Sava-Segal

...Compared to the two string ensembles heard earlier in the week, the Junction Trio is relatively young. Formed in 2015 by three musicians with independent careers who occasionally collaborate to explore a remarkable yet underrepresented repertoire, the trio made its debut at the 92nd Street Y on this occasion. Violinist Stefan Jackiw, cellist Jay Campbell and pianist Conrad Tao opened their performance with Shostakovich's Piano Trio No.2, delivering a rendition notable for its visceral rawness. This quality extended from the witty, caustic *Allegro con brio* and the sardonic, klezmer-inspired dance – intoned by the piano and accompanied by pizzicato strings – in the finale, permeating the entire performance. While extended moments of calm, such as the eerie opening bars or the strings' canon over the piano chords in the *Largo passacaglia*, offered stark contrast, the overarching impression was one of unbridled energy. The other major piece on the program was the 1889 revision of Brahms's Piano Trio No.1 in B major, a work of symphonic proportions in both length and thematic richness. Lushly expressive and resonant, this trio allows the musicians to highlight both their unique voices and their cohesion as an ensemble. The members of the Junction Trio did not shy away from presenting the first movement in its Romantic

splendor with characteristic warmth. Cellist Jay Campbell, playing the composer's favored instrument, infused the arching first theme with a sense of nobility that resonated throughout the piece, including the superb opening statement of the *Finale*. The sensitivity among the players was evident, particularly in the *Adagio*, with its piano chords supporting brooding, interlaced strings – a movement that might well have served as a model for Shostakovich's analogous section heard earlier. The constant intertwining of Jackiw's and Campbell's sumptuous lines over Tao's subtly supportive accompaniment was a standout feature of this rendition. The pianist had his own sparkling moments in the Mendelssohn-like *Scherzo*.

Bookended by the Shostakovich and Brahms trios was the world premiere of John Zorn's *Philosophical Investigations II* which, like its 2022 predecessor, draws its title from a late work by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Echoing the philosopher's perspective that the meaning of words is context-dependent, Zorn engages in his own 'language games', extracting small segments from well-known compositions – such as the introduction to the Brahms Trio featured in the second half of the program – and surrounding them with cocoons of texture and rhythm that transform their original meaning.



Encouraging listeners to reflect on their own understanding of the interplay between sounds and meanings, this second variation on the theme – at times very busy and at others sparse and

lyrical – might be followed by others that the Junction Trio may be prepared to present. After all, we live in an era of fascination with games of all sorts!



## The San Diego Union-Tribune

April 28, 2024

# All-star Junction Trio ‘a new-generation supergroup’

By Beth Wood

Why would three young classical musicians with successful solo touring careers form a trio as a side gig?

In 2015, pianist Conrad Tao, violinist Stefan Jackiw and cellist Jay Campbell launched Junction Trio for two key reasons: the music and the musicianship.

“There are so many astonishingly good pieces in the repertoire,” said Tao, now 29. “We wanted to play trios by Ravel and Beethoven. The piano-violin-cello combination has a very defined heterogeneous quality. It’s beautiful.”

Jackiw and Tao are acclaimed soloists who play with orchestras all over the world. While Campbell has won praise for his solo work, he is best known as a member of the intrepid JACK Quartet.

In the publicity for the trio’s Carnegie Hall concert this Friday, Junction Trio was billed as the “new-generation supergroup.”

Next Sunday, La Jolla Music Society will present Junction Trio at the society’s Baker-Baum Concert Hall. The trio’s members are no strangers to the hall. Each of them has performed there before at SummerFest and all three are in this year’s SummerFest lineup (although at separate times).

and Jackiw were on the same tour in South Korea. The cellist and violinist, now in their mid-to-late 30s, hoped to form a piano trio and contacted Tao through Facebook.

“We didn’t randomly message Conrad,” Campbell said. “We had played with a couple of other pianists, too. We loved

Conrad’s playing. It made sense to get together to play, but not as our main job. It’s our passion project.”

The three American-born, American-trained classical musicians perform as Junction Trio when their schedules allow. Campbell called their short tours musical vacations. Tao agrees.

“It’s really nice that we all three have different things that we can draw on,” Tao said from a solo tour stop in Cincinnati. “We can ask each other for advice and hear each other’s perspectives. We firmly come from different places, but we share musical values.”

The group’s concert in La Jolla will begin with John Zorn’s Philosophical Investigations: Trialogue, which was written specifically for the trio by the famous avant-garde composer. Campbell has worked closely with Zorn and released two CDs of works he composed for the cellist, one in 2015 and the other in 2020.

Campbell described Philosophical Investigations as three distinct people having a conversation, but not always saying the same thing at the same time. It involves intricate timing and string-plucking, including on the piano.

“It’s in line with Zorn’s other work,” Campbell said. “It’s virtuosic and mercurial. A feature of his music is like jump cuts in movies or channel surfing on TV. There are these sudden interruptions to a musical thought.”

Tao explains it this way: “It almost has a bit of Looney Tunes, a rapidity

sometimes. There's a lot of playfulness along with dark, brooding expressions. It's wonderfully exciting."

Next up on the program will be Charles Ives' Piano Trio, which the composer wrote in the early 1900s as a remembrance of his student days at Yale University. Tao, who is also a composer, believes Zorn and Ives to be kindred spirits.

"The second movement of the trio is a scherzo," the pianist said. "Its title is TSIAJ, which stands for 'this scherzo is a joke.' Ives throws everything into that movement. I alternate between being a kind of bass drum and traveling marching band to being like a saloon pianist and then playing a dirge-like version of 'My Old Kentucky Home.' It's an amazing, delightful over-the-top movement.

"The piece ends with a beautiful take on 'Rock of Ages,' played by Jay on the cello. We are left to wonder about Ives' memories, our own memories and feelings evoked by this music."

The closing piece of next Sunday's concert is Beethoven's Piano Trio in B-flat major, Op. 97, widely known as the Archduke Trio.

"Performing that piece is a joy," Tao said, "because it's written in such a way that we can surprise each other live on stage, which is always great."

For Campbell, playing Zorn and Ives readjusts his ears to an expanded

palette, which he then can bring into the Beethoven piece.

"My hope is that it comes off a little bit more radical than maybe people think it is," Campbell said. "That's the hope anyways."

Campbell's main commitment with the JACK Quartet regularly finds him exploring an expanded sonic palette. The ensemble focuses on collaborating with living composers.

"We also play medieval and Renaissance music," he added. "Music of that time that was experimenting with different types of complexity."

The JACK Quartet, presented by Art of Elan and ArtPower, will perform at the Loft at UC San Diego next Monday, the day after Junction Trio appears at the Baker-Baum.

After Sunday's concert, the three members in Junction Trio will disperse to perform at various summer festivals and engage in other musical collaborations.

When in San Diego, Tao hopes to find time for a nonmusical activity — riding roller coasters.

"It's a good hobby because I haven't found a way to turn it into work," Tao said with a laugh. "Anytime I'm reading a cool book, I start turning it into work in my brain. There is no space in your brain when you're riding a roller coaster!"



# SAN DIEGO STORY

May 6, 2024

## The Junction Trio Makes Its Formidable Conrad Debut

By Ken Herman



The first week of May has proven to be a knockout for hearing chamber music in San Diego. On Thursday at the Mingei Museum in Balboa Park, the Camarada ensemble featured the music of Gilad Cohen, and Friday at All Souls' Episcopal Church in Point Loma, The San Diego Bach Collegium performed the concert they will bring to Leipzig's Bach Festival this June. Sunday afternoon at The Conrad in La Jolla, the Junction Trio performed a concert of John Zorn, Charles Ives, and Beethoven, and on Monday the JACK Quartet took up residence for UC San Diego's ArtPower performance series with a program featuring works by Gabriela Smith and Caroline Shaw.

And no musician was busier than cellist Jay Campbell, who performed with Junction on Sunday and then went up the hill Monday to prepare for his

Monday's ArtPower performance with the JACK Quartet.

And although it's not chamber music, I cannot fail to mention that on Tuesday, cellist Yo-Yo Ma plays the Elgar Cello Concerto with the San Diego Symphony under Music Director Rafael Payare at the Civic Theatre.

At The Conrad, the Junction Trio—pianist Conrad Tao, violinist Stefan Jackiw, and cellist Jay Campbell—opened with John Zorn's "Philosophical Investigations," an exciting eleven-minute work written and premiered for the young musicians of the Junction Trio last year. Its spare texture sprinkled with islands of taut, explosive flourishes belies its highly charged emotional impact on the listener. Rapid bravura passages for each instrument alternate and occasionally overlap to form acidic atonal clusters that dissolve as quickly as they appear.

From Zorn's opener, the Junction Trio jumped to Charles Ives' 1915 Piano Trio, the vision of an American avant-garde composer whose complex idiom certainly did not sound 100 years removed from Zorn's! Ives' constantly changing textures and rhapsodic flashes suggested uncanny parallels, and, to be certain, the Junction Trio's astounding finesse and immaculately focused sonority brought these works into surprising sonic compatibility.

Ives' middle movement, a scherzo that speeds by at a breath-taking pace, evokes at times a Surreal circus occasionally interrupted by unexpected slow, mysterious transitions. When Ives is not shaking his fist at musical traditionalists, he writes delectable themes, such as the violin solo at the opening of the final movement, given poignant depth by Stefan Jackiw, followed by cellist Jay Campbell's burnished cantabile solo. Tao fashioned an iridescent *continuo* of supple chromatic arpeggios throughout the movement, over which Jackiw and Campbell intoned Ives' eerie account of that once popular Protestant hymn "Rock of Ages" as the work's final benediction.

After Sunday's intermission, the Junction Trio returned with Beethoven's "Archduke" Piano Trio, Op. 97. Beethoven's expansive, lofty 45-minute trio may not have the heroic character of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies he was writing at the time he completed his "Archduke" Trio, but the Junction Trio's masterful, intense account of this work riveted the La Jolla audience. I was particularly moved by the Junction Trio's elegant traversal of the third movement, "Andante cantabile ma però con moto," a captivating variation cycle based on a serene, almost hymn-like theme that Tao offered with understated command that the three musicians then developed with perceptive zeal.



ConcertoNet.com  
The Classical Music Network

May 5, 2024

## Romping through a Musical Jungle

By Harry Rolnick

“Music conveys to us itself!”  
Ludwig Wittgenstein.

“Beauty in music is too often  
confused with something that lets  
the ears lie back in an easy chair.”  
Charles Ives

Countless times have I heard and marvelled at more than the exciting virtuosity of cellist Jay Campbell and pianist Conrad Tao. One can easily marvel at their fingers and their intellectual understanding. But more than that, one is astonished at their *daring*, their need for challenges, their *adventure* in running, their leaping into the jungles of music. And in conveying their joy to us, the listener.

This is not to ignore violinist Stefan Jackiw. I had never heard him before last night. But his expertise as the third member of Junction Trio was unquestioned. The Junction Trio was formed only two years ago, but the reputation of each artist was so great that they are playing everywhere around the United States and Europe. Last night, though, was their Carnegie Hall debut, where their choices were as illuminating as the Weill Hall chandeliers. Specifically, they started with a work they commissioned by John Zorn, continued with the rare Charles Ives *Trio*, written at the apex of his career in 1915. And they

finished with Beethoven’s great “Archduke” *Trio*.

All three played with a unity to be envied by more seasoned ensembles.

They started with a work they commissioned by John Zorn. Obviously the Junction Trio didn’t want one of Zorn’s deft pastiches of mod and contemporary. He replied with the impossible. *Philosophical*

*Investigations* based on that most impenetrable of all philosophers, Ludwig Wittgenstein. And the sounds reflected the sage.

Try to read Wittgenstein, and within a minute you’ll close the book. Opaque aphorisms, rarefied reflections, word upon word of the meaningless meaning of words, all through a super-erudite eternity.

Mr. Zorn gave Junction Trio crazy opacity. The three artists went into whiplash puzzles, quantum velocity, fingering which defied dexterity—and every so often, Rachmaninoff rhapsodies, turning back to the discombobulations of unplayable music.

Though not unplayable by this trio. And by the way, a hint to Mr. Zorn. Wittgenstein’s favorite movie actor? Carmen Miranda. (Though he loved all Hollywood musicals!) The man and the music defied rationality. And it is one of the most original works by the always surprising Mr. Zorn.

After this, Charles Ives sounded like a doddering old fogey. Of course his *Trio* was difficult. But



by the time he'd quoted and distorted *My Old Kentucky Home*, *Long Long Ago*, and the old Evangelical hymn, *There is a Fountain Filled with Blood*, one felt quite comfortable with the bonkers genius insurance executive.

After all, Ives was playing games. The repetitions of the first movement gave the Junction Trio time to show their solo chops. The finale was lighter, more lyrical, with a few more unidentifiable songs thrown in. But it was the second movement called "TSIAJ ("This Scherzo Is A Joke") Presto" that Ives went to town. The three artists played in three different keys, the trio whipped up and down their respective keyboards, allowing the 1880's songs and hymns to peep and disappear like mice darting in and out of their holes.

After the intermission, the Junction Trio returned to reality.

Or the reality of blessed un-obfuscated sounds. The "Archduke" is Beethoven without tears, without hilarity. Simply a work of utmost deftness, and here played by three splendid players. The first movement never dragged, the colors were light, Mr. Jackiw's playing shone through with lighthanded joy. If the scherzo wasn't quite playful enough, these three emphasized Beethoven's shifts in color, the active chromatic sections.

The third *Andante* showed Junction Trio's sensitivity when needed. That theme has the inspiration of a Schubert and was given a sober no-nonsense interpretation. Which, of course led without pause to Beethoven's joyous finale. This was rhythmic, buoyant, and even the minor-key segments were never over-serious, a splendid ending to these always youthful artists.



# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

December 8, 2023

## 'Industrial' chamber music concert spotlights Pittsburgh composer Amy Williams

By Jeremy Reynolds

Making a living as a musician usually means multiple income streams and artistic pursuits, a mix of performing and teaching and sometimes side gigs.

The members of the New York-based Junction Trio all have lively solo performance careers, and a few weeks out of the year they join forces to perform around the U.S. in venues ranging from Carnegie Hall in New York City to Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas.

On Monday, Dec. 11, the trio will visit Pittsburgh to perform trios by Beethoven (the "Archduke" trio), Charles Ives and Pittsburgh composer Amy Williams at the Pittsburgh Playhouse, 350 Forbes Ave., Downtown, at 7:30 p.m.

"Amy's piece is great — it's called 'Bells and Whistles,' and it's the musical equivalent of steampunk aesthetic," said Stefan Jackiw, a violinist who regularly performs as a soloist with top orchestras around the country.

"It sounds very industrial, like there's great machinery at work with cuckoo clocks and motors whirring."

Williams has taught composition and music theory at the University of Pittsburgh since 2005. Her music often makes use of "extended techniques" like plucking piano strings instead of only playing the keys.

For "Bells and Whistles," she's asked the trio's cellist, Jay Campbell, to slide his hands on the wood of the instrument to create a skidding, dragging sort of sound.

"It's not just a collection of sound effects. There's a clear dramatic arc to the piece," Jackiw said, explaining that the piece fronts rhythm and motivic snippets over melodies.

Audiences for orchestra and opera concerts have been returning slowly since the pandemic decimated arts attendance. Jackiw said that chamber music audiences have appeared to be returning as well, at least from the vantage point of the stage.

"Venues are smaller for chamber music, of course, but it seems like chamber music audiences are particularly die-hard," he said. "People are really into the experience and the intimacy."

Chamber Music Pittsburgh, which presents around six mainstage concerts a year, typically draws around 400 people. In November, the organization sold out its concert with the famous Kronos Quartet to the tune of 560 attendees, though the organization said that was "highly unusual."

Subscriptions have not bounced back as "people seem to be moving towards single tickets and are less likely to commit to dates ahead of time," said Chamber Music Pittsburgh executive director Kristen Linfante.

Like most performing arts organizations, CMP survives primarily on philanthropy rather than ticket sales.

Tickets for the Junction Trio performance start at \$35 and are available

at [chambermusicpittsburgh.org](http://chambermusicpittsburgh.org). The concert is also available to [stream](#) for \$30.

“Now that I can stream movies I go to the theater less,” Jackiw said. “I was worried that would be true for

performances but it really hasn’t been. People are still hungry for in-person experiences.”

# JCT

the  fuse

December 11, 2022

## Celebrity Series Presents Junction Trio — Balancing Flair and Cohesion

By Aaron Keebaugh



Chamber music may be the art of compromise. But violinist Stefan Jackiw, cellist Jay Campbell, and pianist Conrad Tao never lose themselves completely to what their repertoire—and ensemble—demand.

Instead, these musicians, known collectively as the Junction Trio, struck a perfect balance between flair and cohesion in their Celebrity Series recital Saturday night at Jordan Hall. They tempered their individual voices for uniform interpretations, but the exuberant music composed by Amy Williams, Maurice Ravel, Robert Schumann, and Thomas Morley gave each musician opportunities to shine momentarily on his own.

This young, superstar trio is capable of being as cool as it is fiery, and the performers' strengths bring out the best in each other. Jackiw's silvery tone provided an ideal foil for the smokey depths of Campbell's cello. Through it all, Tao was a stalwart presence, soft and robust in his touch whenever the music called for it.

Amy Williams's "Bells and Whistles" showcased the ensemble's colorful whimsy. At 17 minutes, this Celebrity Series co-commission is filled with momentary delights. It opens with strings scratching out a gentle, clock-like rhythm. The sounds gradually coalesce in longer phrases and lines that build to a din. Tao enters the fray with arpeggios



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and runs that churn with a be bopper's zeal. The music then smooths out to an effervescence, with Jackiw and Campbell's sustains evaporating into clouds of pitches high in the ensemble's range before fading into silence.

Though its interweaving of power and stasis compels, "Bells and Whistles" ultimately proves less than the sum of its parts, never quite making a statement that goes beyond entertaining gestures. The Junction Trio, however, clearly believes in this score, and they played it with panache.

They did the same with Ravel's Piano Trio in A minor, a luminous piece that reflects the composer's Basque roots.

In a reading of rapt intensity, Tao's arpeggios ebbed and flowed while the dialogue between Jackiw and Campbell highlighted the orchestral-like dimensions of the outer movements. The Pantoum coursed with swagger; the Passacaille was a journey from darkness to light and back again.

The trio brought an uncommon warmth and reverence to Schumann's Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor. Written as a companion to the more lyrical F major Trio, this work typically generates a stormy ebullience.

This performance had all of that, spread across a canvas that displayed the musicians individual strengths. Tao's phrases in the opening movement crested and broke like waves. Whistle tones from Jackiw and Campbell glowed at a distance at movement's end. Together, they nurtured the hymn-like serenities of the third movement, while the Scherzo and finale were contrastingly vigorous.

That blend of sensitivity and dynamic force provided the centerpiece for the ensemble's arrangement of Thomas Morley's "Christes Crosse" from 1608's *A Plaine and easie Introduction to Practical Musicke*. The Junction Trio substituted this work at the last minute for the originally programmed riff on Carlo Gesualdo's "Tenebrae Responsorias" because, Campbell claimed, "it sounded terrible."

But, while the more ear-soothing Morley takes fewer harmonic liberties, the music teems with rhythmic vitality. The players made it into a romp, with Tao and Campbell joining their phrases in witty dialogue around Jackiw's fervent cantus firmus. In a concert packed with dramatic urgency, this short work came off as a brief but jovial conversation among friends.

# JCT

# STRINGS

October 28, 2022

## How Chamber Music Supergroups Come Together... and Sometimes Come Apart

By Brian Wise



The phenomenon of the supergroup—comprised of prominent artists and sometimes fueled by clashing egos—has surfaced in every major genre, from rock and opera to chamber music. It wasn't on the agenda of violinist Stefan Jackiw, cellist Jay Campbell, and pianist Conrad Tao when they gathered at Tao's Manhattan apartment in late 2015 to read through Mendelssohn's D minor piano trio. But out of this meetup grew the Junction Trio, and the label of classical music supergroup began to stick.

"We were talking about how there aren't as many piano trios as string quartets, and how there was a missing trio in our age bracket," says Campbell, who was 26 at the time and who plays in the JACK Quartet. The piano trio is well established as a soloists' format. "That repertoire was more suitable for three people who are coming from different places than, say, a supergroup string quartet."

But Campbell stresses that the Junction Trio is not an ensemble that convenes

for galas or one-off festival dates and then parts ways for a year, failing to build a core identity. He has encountered plenty of those trios on recordings.

"As amazing as those records are, I sometimes don't feel like there's a sense of unity where I want there to be unity," he says. "Sometimes it's OK to be loose and soloistic, but sometimes you can tell that maybe they hadn't really talked about the details: 'How are we vibrating here? What kind of tone are we going for?' And so you hear three people."

Apart from a small handful of string quartets, notably the Tetzlaff Quartet, classical supergroups tend to be piano trios. They are most enthralling—or maddening—when a certain freewheeling one-upmanship is on display. Yet some have been plagued by infighting or divergent solo careers. The so-called Million Dollar Trio of 1949–51 (Rubinstein, Piatigorsky, and Heifetz) disbanded due to clashing egos. The innovative 1970s quartet Tashi (Ida Kavafian, Peter Serkin, Fred Sherry, and Richard Stoltzman) dissolved amid illness, marriages, and divorces (it reunited briefly in 2008). Other groups form with a handshake in a studio but fail to take off.

Cellist Steven Isserlis is one-third of a supergroup with violinist Joshua Bell and pianist Jeremy Denk. He disavows the term, fearing the implication that a record label executive is pulling the levers. "It wasn't in any way a



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supergroup,” he says of the trio’s origins, which grew out of decades-long mutual friendships.

“I think I’ve got enough of a musical ego, and I’m enough of a pain in the neck, that I would not do that,” he says with a chuckle. “If I was being made to play with somebody, I would say no. You often get that at chamber music festivals, where people throw famous names together onstage, and it can be ghastly. It can be hideous. Wild horses would not drag me to it.”

Isserlis, Bell, and Denk have together made an all-Brahms recording for Sony Classical, and in 2019 gave a ten-city U.S. tour. There are ongoing discussions about future tours. “We made a recording of the Mendelssohn Trio, but it hasn’t come out,” Isserlis says. “What’s happened to that? So, it’s definitely not a record-company creation. In between the three of us, there’s a lot of energy. There’s tension, but it’s creative tension.”

### ***Supergroup Struggles***

A record company was behind the A-list trio of violinist Jascha Heifetz, cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, and pianist Arthur Rubinstein. Executives at RCA Victor had envisioned a modern version of the triumvirate of violinist Jacques Thibaud, cellist Pablo Casals, and pianist Alfred Cortot. After several years of planning, the ensemble debuted with four concerts at Ravinia in 1949. *Life* magazine published an article dubbing it the Million Dollar Trio—possibly a nod to the members’ fees—and the name stuck. Piatigorsky moved to Los Angeles, joining his partners, and RCA recorded their versions of Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn, and Ravel trios.

The three artists famously clashed during those sessions. There were disagreements over whose instrument should be most prominent in the recording mix. “They wanted me to play like a mouse!” Piatigorsky complained, according to a 2010 biography of the cellist by Terry King. Heifetz heard things differently. “The balance is all wrong,” he said in one rehearsal. “I can hear the cello.” There were also

squabbles over fees. Rubinstein demanded a raise from his agent, Sol Hurok, after hearing that Heifetz’s fee was double that of his own.

The infighting escalated to publicity materials. They argued over whether the trio should be called “Rubinstein-Heifetz-Piatigorsky” or “Heifetz-Rubinstein-Piatigorsky” (the cellist didn’t have a chance). Since the genre was a piano trio, Rubinstein argued that the pianist should come first. He and Heifetz never played again together, though the trio’s recordings remain in the catalog.

Other supergroups have sought to avoid such troubles. The trio of pianist Eugene Istomin, violinist Isaac Stern, and cellist Leonard Rose jokingly proposed the name \$683,926.50 Trio. Indeed, while Stern commanded the highest solo fees of the group, group payments were reportedly split evenly. Still, the musicians had their differences. “At the beginning, we envisaged the thing as an idealized fraternity,” Istomin told an interviewer. But Rose observed the delicate balance at play: “We are three major personalities, three egos, three prima donnas, yet we have to blend and give and come to a common understanding.”

The contentious issue of top billing has been circumvented in the modern era with names like the Beaux Arts Trio or the Eroica Trio. The Junction Trio’s name is a riff on the members initials—Jackiw, Campbell, and Tao—as well as “an expression of what the group ends up being,” says Tao.

Disagreements over balance can surface, however. “As a pianist playing chamber music, you get very used to being asked to play softer,” Tao says, “and without a doubt I resent that a little bit. When you talk about mixes of recordings, I definitely remember asking for more piano in mixes. But I’ve never experienced resistance from the other boys on that front. That is not my gripe with Jay or Stefan. That is my gripe with chamber music culture at large. That might be my ego rearing its head as well.”

Jackiw says that the piano-trio format, with its complementary timbres, can withstand a certain personality-driven approach. “Violin and cello can both fit into the piano sound but also stand out from it,” he says. “Issues of unity are not quite as precarious and finicky as in a string quartet.”

### *Marketing Piano Trios*

Some concert programmers find that audiences expect more star power from piano trios than from string quartets. Kathy Schuman, the vice president and artistic director of the Caramoor Festival in Katonah, New York, says that this makes booking trios a challenge. “I’m always a little bit wary of piano trios,” she says. “Sometimes I think it’s a little unfair to some full-time piano trios—the ones that are really playing many concerts a year and that are perhaps overlooked in this repertoire. [But] audiences tend to go for ones made up of three soloists.” Last year, Caramoor presented the Junction Trio. “Even though the Junction Trio is not called the Jackiw-Campbell-Tao Trio, people do very much know who’s in it and that it’s three soloists,” she adds.

The Junction Trio performs together for at least a month every year, whereas some supergroups—including the trio of violinist Leonidas Kavakos, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and pianist Emanuel Ax—reunite on a more sporadic basis. “A lot of those starry piano trios work together for a few weeks a year, and it’s a very special thing,” Schuman says. “It’s just going to be different than a group like the Junction Trio.”

The 1980s were a particularly fruitful era for piano trios. A 1981 *New York Times* article highlighted five new

recordings of Tchaikovsky’s Piano Trio in A minor, including one by the trio of Mikhail Pletnev, Elmar Oliveira, and Nathaniel Rosen, and another by Vladimir Ashkenazy, Itzhak Perlman, and Lynn Harrell. The latter recording brought that ensemble the first of its two Grammy Awards.

Today the very notion of a chamber music supergroup may be lost on listeners who aren’t aficionados of the genre, yet starry gatherings still dot concert calendars. Next May, Isserlis is slated to take part in a Carnegie Hall concert honoring the centenary of Andrei Sakharov, performing a Shostakovich trio with violinist Maxim Vengerov and pianist Evgeny Kissin. (The program will also feature violinist Gidon Kremer, pianist Lera Auerbach, and the Emerson Quartet.)

Despite his concerns about ad hoc chamber music, Isserlis says he looks forward to reuniting with old colleagues. “If you meet somebody at a dinner party, you can start talking and you feel like you’ve known them all of your life,” he observes. “And I’ve played enough music with Evgeny and Maxim that I think it will work.”

Tao of the Junction Trio believes that the “one-night stand” model has a spontaneous appeal. “There’s something to be said for the sheer urgency of that kind of music making,” he says. But his regular trio takes priority. “You can build a deeper level of trust and knowledge of one another. You can take a lot more risks and you can surprise each other, and that is very special.”





February 11, 2021

## WQXR Introduces Artist Propulsion Lab



Individual creators and performers have been hit hard by the pandemic shutdown, which has made it especially difficult for them to earn an income. WQXR has been working on ways to help in any way it can, so as part of its [newly-announced STAR initiative](#), WQXR is pleased to announce the first cohort of its Artist Propulsion Lab. The following six early and mid-career artists, hand-selected by the WQXR team, will receive an honorarium of \$15,000, as well as a budget of up to \$5,000 to

engage collaborators and commission works. They will have the opportunity to take advantage of WQXR's various outlets to reach audiences, too, via Greene Space performances, on-air curation opportunities, and much, much more.

### Junction Trio

Pianist Conrad Tao, violinist Stefan Jackiw, and cellist Jay Campell made a masterful move when they formed the Junction Trio, described by the *Aspen Times* as a group with "bracing technique and jaw-dropping precision."

Each member has had experience outside of this group: Tao's *Everything Must Go* was premiered by the New York Philharmonic in 2018, and the following season he made his recital debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Campbell, also a member of the JACK Quartet, is the only musician to be twice awarded the Avery Fisher Career Grant. And while live performances have been suspended, Jackiw has been using the time to deliver [Stefan's Sessions](#) to the people, described as "In-Depth Explorations of Violin Masterworks."

We welcome these six wonderful artists to the Artist Propulsion Lab, and look forward to enjoying everything they do!



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November 28, 2022

## Three young talents to come together at Union College

By Joseph Dalton

When the Junction Trio performs at Union College on Sunday afternoon, December 4, there will be a familiar presence on the stage. The violinist Stefan Jackiw has previously performed for Capital Region Classical twice and he was also soloist in the Brahms Concerto with the Albany Symphony Orchestra in 2018. This time he's part of a team with pianist Conrad Tao and cellist Jay Campbell. Their program features trios by Zorn, Ives and Ravel.

Jackiw, 37, says he doesn't mind sharing the bill. "It's a pleasure to play with two people who have made me grow so much as a musician, expanding my taste and also my thinking about rehearsing and interpreting great music. Being in a trio has been a dream of mine since my 20s."

Born and raised in Boston, Jackiw made his debut at age 12 with the Boston Pops and since then the list of major orchestras where he has performed just keeps growing. Last week, he was with the Cleveland Orchestra performing Britten and during the summer he was featured with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Carnegie Hall. So it appears that his career is moving ahead quite well. But he was still looking for something more.

"In summer 2015, I was paired with Jay the cellist in a chamber music tour of South Korea. I clicked with him as a person and loved his playing. Later back

in New York we said let's find a pianist and see how it goes," Jackiw said.

They reached out to Tao via Facebook. Soon after, the nascent trio gathered to read some Mendelssohn and Mozart and things continued from there. Jackiw says the name "Junction" was chosen because it represents roads coming together and parting and that speaks to how each member continues on his own career path.

Jackiw finds membership in a trio a more comfortable fit than taking a permanent seat in a string quartet. In a trio the distinct character of each instrument is an inherent asset while members of a quartet strive for a sound that is cohesive, as if one voice. "More strings means the work is more delicate, more finicky. It's difficult for a quartet to sound good and still be part time," he says.

The violinist makes a point that part-time chamber groups aren't the same as what might be called drive-by super groups. When big stars come together for some kind of gala event and play with little rehearsal, the result can be flashy but also shallow or "half baked" as Jackiw puts it. In contrast, Junction has had 15 bookings during 2022, mostly focusing on the same repertoire, thus assuring that they're offering well considered and honed performances. After the recital in Schenectady they'll finish up the year with a sold-out



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concert in Washington at the Phillips Collection.

“We have different aesthetics and ideas, but our priorities are aligned,” Jackiw said. “We all want the same thing — to present these pieces in as convincing way as possible.”

When the Junction members return to their independent paths, they do diverge. Tao has a solid track record as a pianist, including opening the 2017 SPAC season of the Philadelphia Orchestra as soloist in Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 1. But he’s equally known as a composer. Among other projects, he’s written a concerto for Jackiw and a trio for Junction plus works that he plays in solo recitals.

Campbell, the cellist, is even more immersed in new music as a member of the Jack Quartet, which since its founding in 2005 has earned wide acclaim for its exclusive focus on new work. Among Campbell’s solo projects are two discs of music by John Zorn.

Speaking of John Zorn, contemporary music has had an increasing presence in the annual seasons of Capital Region Classical, but spotting the name Zorn on this year’s calendar was still a surprise. Though he’s 69 years old, Zorn can still be considered a renegade. He rose to prominence in the late 1980s from the downtown scene of Manhattan where he played clarinet with cats from the jazz world and wrote strident pieces for more conventional forces like the Kronos Quartet. A rare solo recital by Zorn in 2013 at EMPAC was a blistering tour de force that the composer later released on disc (“The Classic Guide To Strategy, Vol. 4”).

“Ghosts” is the six-minute Zorn work that Junction will perform. According to Jackiw, it’s based on the first four bars of Beethoven’s Piano Trio in D major, Op.70 No.1 “Ghost.” He describes it as “highly kinetic and

agitated, with lots of play with texture that creates an ethereal spectral sound world.”

The real surprise comes when Jackiw explains that venues around the country have been far more resistant about music of Charles Ives rather than something by Zorn. Both composers wrote music with a stiff spine and a certain attitude. For Ives it might be called “cantankerous,” where with Zorn it’s “in your face.” As to the appeal of one but not the other, Jackiw said, “the Zorn is short and has an evocative title that seems innocent. Ives is 30-minutes long, not programmatic, with no catchy title.”

Capital Region audiences have already been well indoctrinated in Ivesian by pianist Jeremy Denk, who’s performed each of Ives’ two piano sonatas on different programs at Union over the last decade or so. Also, Jackiw joined Denk in March 2019 for a program dedicated entirely to Ives’ four sonatas for violin and piano. For fans of American music, all of these were special occasions and the Trio should also prove memorable.

“The scherzo’s title is ‘TSIJ’ for ‘This scherzo is a joke’ and it’s extremely rowdy with all kinds of music influences—marching bands, honkytonk, and church hymns. The final movement is this nostalgic reverie. He was a thorny modernist but also deeply romantic like Brahms,” Jackiw said.

Rounding out the program is the beloved Ravel Trio which was completed in 1915, almost the exact time frame as the Ives. “There’s this kinship with the slow movement of the Ives,” the violinist said. “Ravel is speaking of memory and nostalgia and looking backward. The piece may be the most opulent in creative writing for the trio.”

# JCT



May 14, 2021

## Electrifying chamber music from the Junction Trio in Cleveland

By Sam Jacobson



Northeast Ohio audiences were met with some welcome news at the tail end of a concert season unlike any other with the Cleveland Chamber Music Society's return to live, in-person performances. The second of the three-concert series brought to the stage the youthful and exuberant Junction Trio, comprised of Stefan Jackiw (violin), Jay Campbell (cello) and Conrad Tao (piano). All have distinguished careers as soloists and the three of them banding together yields something of a supergroup.

One could hardly have asked for a more adventurous first half, devoted to two American iconoclasts: John Zorn and Charles Ives. Zorn's 2015 work *Ghosts* takes its cue from

Beethoven's "Ghost" Trio, using the earlier work's famously eerie textures as a point of departure. Extended techniques (including plucking the piano strings) were employed liberally, creating a spectral, otherworldly soundscape. Matters often felt disembodied, as fragments floating through a phantasmagoric realm, resisting the urge to coalesce into a full melody. The music was generally restrained until a sudden outburst in the final moments, showing in no uncertain terms the trio's thorough command of this daunting music.

Ives' *Piano Trio* was written as an homage to his college days at Yale. The three movements are said to depict a

lecture, revelry and a Sunday church service respectively. Completed in 1911, the work didn't receive its first public performance until 1948 – an event which the program notes reveal took place in the Cleveland area. The opening *Moderato* was sparsely textured, beginning as a dialogue between the cello and piano. The same material was subsequently repeated in scoring for violin and piano, and finally for all three instruments. Searching and discursive, Ives' music seemingly probed for answers in exploring the same theme through various voices.

Labeled “TSIAJ” (humorously, an acronym for “This Scherzo is a joke”), the central movement was as eclectic as it gets, interpolating a wide array of American folk tunes. The ensemble performed with a manic drive, sailing through the note-spattered pages and rhythmic complexities with apparent ease. The finale opened pensive and pious, markedly Ivesian in the way a lyricism was cultivated amongst the spiky dissonances. A resonant cello melody and impassioned pianism were

amongst the highlights, and the work touchingly ended with a setting of the church hymn *Rock of Ages*.

The latter half (when accustomed to the abbreviated programs of the pandemic era, even an intermission feels like a novelty!) was devoted to Beethoven's magnificent “Archduke” Trio. Majestic, spacious beginnings showed the composer at his most noble and life-affirming. The ensemble astutely navigated through the inventive development, with the pizzicato passages especially striking. I found the pianist to be a bit too percussive here, although I suspect the temperamental acoustics of the capacious church posed a challenge.

The Scherzo opened in the strings, answered in due course by the stylishly playful piano, and the slow movement proceeded as a radiant set of variations on a beautifully voiced chordal theme, sumptuous in its depth of feeling. A finale made for a joyous and unencumbered closing, but not without suitable contrast from stormier sections.



## Seen and Heard International

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May 30, 2021

# Dazzling Philadelphia debut by the spectacularly talented Junction Trio

By Bernard Jacobson

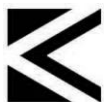
'I am large, I contain multitudes', Charles Ives might have been inclined to say, if Walt Whitman hadn't already said it some years before Ives was born. Whitman prefaced those words with a similarly bold declaration, 'Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself'. Both formulations would certainly have come naturally from Ives in his capacity as one of the great mavericks of the Western music world.

Musical ideas tumbled out of Ives's mind in seemingly inexhaustible profusion, and he clearly felt that their mutual democratic jostlings offered the best way to get them into what might be called a healthily Bidenesque state of readiness to simply 'get things done'. At first blush, one might think that there could hardly be a more radically different program neighbor for Ives's Piano Trio than Ravel's essay in the same genre. Where Ives's delight was to throw his materials in the air and watch to see how they land, there is almost always in Ravel's music a clearly definable rhythmic and textural pulse that acts to restrain any such free flight, imposing a logical and sustainable regularity on even the most seemingly disparate elements.

But it is this very radical contrast of method and approach that underlines the individual characters of these two fine works as well as their more obvious dissimilarities. Each ranks very high in its composer's oeuvre. I have long felt that Ives's mastery was most readily to

be felt in his songs, piano works and chamber music, and the Piano Trio, which I confess I was encountering for the first time at this concert, emphatically supported that view, more than rivaling his big orchestral works in combining freshness of inspiration with freedom from deliberate eccentricity. And while some of Ravel's big orchestral works are as impressive as his chamber and instrumental music (despite its modest title, for example, his *Rapsodie espagnole* surely stands as a masterpiece of the first water), the Piano Trio blends expressive richness and rhythmic inventiveness with structural strength as convincingly as anything he wrote.

It was the unerring way that the Junction Trio laid bare all these musical relationships and contrasts, as well as the skittering textural discontinuities of the Beethoven-inspired *Ghosts* by John Zorn (in whom I would never have imagined myself discovering an affinity with Webern), that made the program of the group's local debut as illuminating as the performances that their choice of works drew from these young players. Stefan Jackiw is a violinist of persuasive lyrical gifts and technical prowess whom I have had occasion to admire in a wide variety of repertoire since hearing him tackle Paganini with authority at the age of 15. Conrad Tao is a pianist and composer whose local debut with the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia a few years ago fairly bowled me over. And Jay Campbell showed himself to be a



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musician fully worthy of his association with those two spectacular talents – I hope that he will not feel slighted by the suggestion that his less obviously

demonstrative musical personality may well function as the glue that holds this phenomenally gifted new ensemble together.



**New York**  
CLASSICAL REVIEW

June 22, 2020

## **New Music for New Times**

By George Grella

***Trapani/Ives/Dvořák (Live). Junction Trio (Self-Released).*** The Junction Trio is a newish all-star group comprising violinist Stefan Jackiw, cellist Jay Campbell, and pianist/composer Conrad Tao. This release combines live performances recorded from 2018 and 2019. The playing is excellent throughout, technically superior and also vibrant and responsive, the musicians in the moment with each other and the audiences. Though from different eras, the well-made program builds momentum with the linear accumulation of excitement as if the listener were there.





# The Boston Globe

July 3, 2019

## JCT Trio stuns in Rockport with superb Ives and Dvorák

By Zoë Madonna .

ROCKPORT — Stefan Jackiw, violinist of the JCT Trio, must be very good at sleeping on planes. That, or he's tapped into some boundless well of energy the rest of us can only dream of. As Rockport Music artistic director Barry Shiffman explained from the stage of the Shalin Liu Performance Center before the trio (which pronounces its name "Junction") started its Sunday afternoon concert, Jackiw had flown in from Korea just the day before. His next stop was Germany, for a Mozart concerto later this week.

His trio mates, the cellist Jay Campbell and pianist Conrad Tao, are also familiar with haywire schedules; with Campbell in the JACK Quartet and Tao performing, composing, and curating all over the place, neither has any shortage of gigs. But watching the trio perform, one really couldn't tell who was happier to be there — the rapt audience or the musicians, who threw themselves into repertoire they clearly love. The itchy glissandos and dissonant chimes of Christopher Trapani's brief "Passing Through, Staying Put" started things off. Charles Ives's Piano Trio followed, after a few animated remarks from Jackiw. The trio blasted through the scherzo, a quintessential Ivesian clangor that mashes together a whole sheaf of folk tunes and hymns. The third movement

burned slowly with yearning for an ineffable something, and Campbell's cello glowed with understated sweetness. In that moment, the 100-plus-year-old piece felt as ageless as the sea outside.

As for Dvorák's Piano Trio No. 3, I have never heard any performance of a standard repertoire piece that was so unconcerned with sounding beautiful.

The trio played on a knife edge. Sprawling across the keys and surging off the bench, Tao's stage presence was the most extroverted of the three — unusual for a piano trio, in which pianists more often sit calmly in the eye of the hurricane. This was a perfect setup for the very Bohemian-sounding scherzo, in which the piano has an initial starring role; he dispatched it in a series of carefully controlled explosions. Supporting him, Jackiw and Campbell hopped through restless bowed triplets, then ripped into their own striding melody.

In the third movement, the players didn't luxuriate in the slow melodies. Instead, with the strings applying just a hint of vibrato, and Tao's unhurried but unrelenting momentum driving the sound, its power lay in its ephemeral nature. These three are onto something special.



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# The Boston Musical Intelligencer

July 2, 2019

## JCT Trio Fabulous in Shalin Liu

By Susan Miron



Nearing my 200<sup>th</sup> review for the *Intelligencer*, I have heard my share of mind-bogglingly good pianists, several at Rockport Music. Yesterday the 24-year-old pianist/composer Conrad Tao entered my piano pantheon as someone I *really* want to hear again, soon. He appeared in a new trio, an acronym of his last name with violinist Stefan Jackiw's and hot-ticket-cellist Jay Campbell—the JCT Trio. An unappealing name for a fabulous trio, which features one of my most admired violinists, but beauty and thrills there came aplenty.

Jackiw is well-known to Boston audiences, having grown up here, gone to college here, and completed an Artist Diploma at NEC. This past January, he appeared on the Celebrity Series with pianist Jeremy Denk (and the all-male vocal quartet, Hudson Shad) playing Ives four piano and violin sonatas. This listener found it one of the most exciting concerts of the year (they will be recording it). Tao won, among other honors, eight consecutive ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Awards. He is a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts, a Davidson Fellow

Laureate, and a Gilmore Foundation Young Artist, the only classical artist named by Forbes magazine in 2011 as one of the “30 Under 30” in the music industry. (He was 17 at the time.). Cellist Jay Campbell, like Jackiw and Tao, took the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. He also serves as cellist of the JACK Quartet which the Boston Globe called “superheroes of the new music world.”

Christopher Trapani (b.1980), who wrote his seven-minute, colorful and atmospheric two-part trio, *Passing Through, Staying Put in 20*, noted that it took its title from Geoff Dyer's “Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi.” The first half, “Passing Through,” is all about motion and change; a long chain of consonant four-note chords... calculated to correspond to a set of meticulous voice-leading principles—unfolds throughout, while snippets of material in the strings move in and out of phase in charisma patterns inspired by the American composer Conlon Nancarrow. By contrast, the second part, “Staying Put,” deals with settling and stasis, a sense of arrival.” We heard a lot of snazzy slides and pinpoint accuracy—a hallmark, it seems, of this trio which would come in handy in the Ives Trio that followed. The inspired opener got and held everyone's attention from the first notes.

Ives's Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano (ca. 1909-1910, rev. ca. 1914-1915) came across with brilliance, (brilliantly reviewed in these pages by Vance Koven [HERE](#)). In that same review, Koven remarked about how difficult it



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is to speak from the stage. This issue has long bothered this reviewer as well, but on Sunday, Jackiw rose charismatically to the occasion and provided the audience with intelligent background on Ives, “...the father of modern-day estate planning.” I don’t expect to hear anything more exciting this summer than the JCT Trio’s astounding interpretation, especially the second movement which left me giggling with joy. The third movement sounded simply glorious—so evocative that it seemed these players had the power to change the weather; suddenly the sun started peeking through after a long spell of rain.

There is nothing like hearing — and seeing — electrifying performers work their magic live. This top-notch trio stands at the top of its game. They made this treacherously difficult music sound entirely natural and fun, while still inspiring awe. The range of compositional devices Ives used —

polytonality, atonality, complex multi-rhythms, tone clusters, 12-tone rows, metrical modulation, and microtonality — disturbed or bewildered nearly all of his contemporaries. The composer was frustrated by indifferent audiences and ambivalent critics throughout his career. Now, it would seem, due to spectacular performances like this trio’s, Ives is, well, hot.

The describe themselves as “three visionary artists of the next generation (who) have joined forces to form a compelling, forward thinking piano trio.” So, where does the familiar Dvořák’s Piano Trio No. 3, in F Minor fit into this vision? Well, I’m not sure, except that this 41-minute chestnut came across with world-class passion. The composer himself participated in the first performance in 1883. He would have been stirred by this traversal, especially the deeply emotional slow movement, delivered with perfection.



January 9, 2019

## JCT trio brings electricity to Lied Center

By John Cutler

Excitement may be the best word to characterize the JCT Piano Trio.

JCT would be the last-name initials of violinist Stefan Jackiw, cellist Jay Campbell and pianist Conrad Tao. JCT (call 'em "Junction") invaded the Johnny Carson Theatre at the Lied Center on Wednesday night with animated performances of Haydn, Dvorak and Ives for the Lincoln Friends of Chamber Music series.

The electricity began almost instantaneously with the Haydn "Gypsy" Piano Trio No. 39 in G Major, Hob. XV/25. Good articulation and sparkling youthful ebullience made the opening andante a gem. The final movement rondo was in great period conception and Jackiw let fly on the violin for a virtuosic conclusion.

The 150 or so patrons in the audience got some instruction about the Charles Ives "Piano Trio." Ives pits opposing melodies together to sound dissonant. JCT handled the dissonance perfectly — difficult to assimilate — and molded it

together well through the final movement.

Dvorak's "Piano Trio No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 65" completed the performance. A brilliantly played, animated introduction was followed with a gorgeous cello melody from Campbell, whose accompaniment for the work was full of double- and triple-stops.

Dvorak inserted an allegro grazioso instead of a scherzo for this trio, perhaps in honor of his mother, who had passed while he was composing it. The constant emotions of the work were evident, and pianist Tao rendered fine tribute to the composer's agony.

Struggle gave way to triumph in the concluding allegro con brio, as players judiciously kept the work absolutely on track to the end. No wonder LFCM patrons offered shouts and bravos with wild applause!

It must be fate and magic glue for JCT: They are new, they are exciting when they play together, and they are going places.



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# JCT

## The Chautauquan Daily

July 8, 2019

### CSO to Celebrate Nature and Create Dialogue With JCT Trio

By Val Lick



After a chamber music concert Monday afternoon, the JCT Trio — pronounced “Junction” Trio — will unite with the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra to perform Ludwig van Beethoven’s Concerto for Violin, Cello and Piano in C major, Op. 56.

The concert will take place at 8:15 p.m. Tuesday, July 9 in the Amphitheater. Alongside the Beethoven piece, which is often known simply as Beethoven’s Triple Concerto, the orchestra will perform classical Finnish composer Einojuhani Rautavaara’s “Cantus Arcticus”: Concerto for Birds and Orchestra, Op. 61; and classical Czech composer Bedřich Smetana’s From Bohemia’s Forests and Meadows from “*Má vlast*” (My Fatherland).

Rossen Milanov, conductor and CSO music director, said the concert’s pieces are inspired by nature and fit Week Three’s theme:

“A Planet in Balance: A Week in Partnership with National Geographic Society.”

Milanov said the opening piece, Rautavaara’s “Cantus Arcticus,” meshes orchestral music with recorded birdsong.

**“It’s in three movements, and each of the movements features a tape of recorded birdsong that simultaneously play with the orchestra,” Milanov said. “There are infinite possibilities as the orchestral instruments mix with those actual birdcalls. ... It’s a very beautiful, very evocative piece.”**

Milanov said the piece presents a unique challenge for the orchestra.

“It’s interesting, combining the recording of something that happens naturally, such as the birdcalls, with an orchestra,” Milanov said. “The challenge is for the musical instruments to fit into



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the tape and have those dialogues with the birds.”

The next piece is Smetana’s From Bohemia’s Forests and Meadows. Milanov said the piece is inspired by a moment of cultural establishment, and Smetana drew from central European folklore and identity to capture his country’s natural beauty.

“Smetana was a composer from the second half of the 19th century, when each of the small European nations were establishing their own culture, their own folklore, their own identity,” Milanov said. “He creates ... moments of grandeur, leading you into the forest where all sorts of fantastic creatures could exist. It’s a very poetic, very romantic piece.”

Milanov said the JCT Trio will join the orchestra for the concert’s final piece, the Triple Concerto, “which in itself is quite an original idea because Beethoven combines a string trio — normally an ensemble that performs chamber music — with a full orchestra.”

JCT Trio pianist Conrad Tao said the group’s name, which contains all three members’ last initials, is pronounced “Junction” because of the members’ different backgrounds and shared joy in music.

“Each of us do our own thing, and there’s a lot of overlap between the three of us, but there’s also quite a lot of distinctness between us — what our careers look like, what we’re interested in,” Tao said. “So when we play together, it’s just about wanting to play together.”

Tao said the members chose a simple name to reflect their paths meeting in a series of performances.

**“It’s actually very simple — for me, it feels like a place where I can just dive into the pure joy and pleasure of making music**

**with friends and playing pieces that we really love,” Tao said. “So in naming it, nothing excruciatingly poetic would do; ‘junction’ feels right — it’s just us playing together in a dynamic meeting of sorts.”**

Tonight, that meeting will include the CSO and the Triple Concerto.

Concertos are a type of composition that feature a solo part backed by a large orchestra. Tao said the Triple Concerto is somewhat unique in that it includes three solo parts — making it the natural choice for the trio, who each have extensive backgrounds as soloists.

“This is an anomaly of a concerto; I don’t think there’s very many concertos for three soloists and an orchestra,” Tao said.

Tonight’s concert, Tao said, will be the first time the three musicians play the Triple Concerto together for an audience. He said the piece provides a unique opportunity for pianists.

“In a piano trio repertoire, I think pianists are usually given music that is guiding the overall structure, because the instrument has a large range of sound,” Tao said. “In the Triple Concerto, the orchestra provides all of that context and all of that sense of a larger musical environment, where I, as a pianist, am much more like Stefan (Jackiw) or Jay (Campbell) where the music I’m making is just lyrical and melodic.”

Campbell, cellist of the JCT Trio, said the Triple Concerto is also unique in its light tone.

**“It’s a very joyful piece; it feels sort of carefree compared to some of Beethoven’s other work — I don’t think he’s trying to grapple with the problems of the universe in this piece,” Campbell said.**



# THE ASPEN TIMES

July 7, 2018

## Soprano Susanna Phillips tops Aspen Music Festival's first full week

By Harvey Steiman

Professionals and more than 600 students combine for an eight-week immersion into classical music for the rest of us in the casual atmosphere of a Rocky Mountain resort town at the Aspen Music Festival. The first week of July sketched a fine example of the musical breadth and quality typical of this hybrid of music-training and serious performance.

Through Thursday, public offerings included a rousing Shostakovich "Leningrad" Symphony from the Aspen Festival Orchestra in the 2,000-seat Benedict Music Tent. A magnificent recital by soprano Susanna Phillips and an invigorating outing by the young Junction Trio graced the 500-seat Harris Hall.

Phillips scored the highlight of the week. A late sub for the originally scheduled Renée Fleming, Phillips directed her opulent sound to pointedly express a glorious range of emotional nuances on her program, with longtime collaborator pianist Myra Huang. Though Huang could occasionally overpower Phillips, especially when the soprano sang in the lower range, they were together in intent.

Samuel Barber's "Hermit Songs," mostly translated from 8th to 12th century Irish texts, focus on men who elect to live alone, usually for religious reasons. Phillips invested each one with a different personality, some dead serious, some humorous. Something in her voice also found a way to comment further

upon that. Balance problems were no issue in the rest of the program, starting with Schumann's heart-on-sleeve "Frauenliebe und – leben," a collection of lovestruck songs intended to express his fiancée Clara Wieck's feelings. Phillips acknowledged, in a brief introduction, that today's listeners might criticize his efforts but she prefers to believe that the composer shared the same blind devotion expressed in the sublimely sweet music. The performance was delicious.

Hugo Wolf's "Mignon" songs express a weightier kind of passion, especially in the last one, "Kennst du das Land," which rose to a climax that might have tested Phillips' lyric soprano, but she nailed it for a thrilling finish.

Even more turmoil emerged in Libby Larson's 2001 song cycle "Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII," the texts preserved from the five wives the 16th-century English king discarded. Phillips found a rainbow of colors in the various iterations of anger, sorrow, serenity and logical argument, and plenty of dramatic

After all this serious stuff, the encore achieved hearty laughs in seven acerbic Mark Twain quotations set to hilarious musical effect by composer Gordon Myers. Two directly reference music in his 1998 set, "Do You Sing, Mr. Twain?" "On Wagner" quotes Twain's "Wagner's music is really much better than it sounds" to a snippet of "Die Meistersinger." The finale, "Rules for



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Writing No. 14," rings elaborate expansions referencing Handel and Verdi in merrily violating Twain's two-word "rule," "Eschew surplusage." Only Bryn Terfel among opera singers today nails humor so perfectly as Phillips did. In their recital Thursday in Harris Hall, violinist Stefan Jackiw, cellist Jay Campbell and pianist Conrad Tao, a.k.a. the Junction Trio (the initials of their last names spell JCT) lavished bracing technique and jaw-dropping precision on piano trios by Ives and Ravel. Jackiw set the scene for the rambunctious Ives piece in an introduction that sketched the composer's life story and how it affected the music. A thorny first movement resolves with an unexpected major chord, a scherzo that blatantly calls itself a "joke" merrily clashes totally different but familiar strands, the finale veers toward nostalgia. The playing here never let up in intensity.

A sense of unity, especially in dynamics and rhythmic thrust, made the Ravel Trio come together impressively. Tao led the way, pushing the music to surge and ebb, etching delicate tunes and harmonies one moment and pulling out the throttle for thrilling climaxes.

On a change-of-pace chamber music program Monday, faculty artists played Ravel and 15 student trombonists took on a short work by Alan Fletcher, the festival's president and CEO. In a sumptuous reading of Los Angeles violist Roland Kato's 1999 arrangement of Ravel's 1911 "Mother Goose Suite." Pianist Andrew Harley corralled the ensemble, led with sweet tone by violinist Bing Wang. The score's unusual voicings often required violist James Dunham and cellist Desmond Hoebig to play higher than Wang's melodic line.

Timothy Pitts completed the quintet on bass.

Per Brevig, principal trombone of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra for 26 years, conducted 15 student trombonists and rushed them through Wesley Hanson's arrangement of "Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral from Lohengrin." Dedicated to Brevig, Fletcher's new piece, Fanfare and Variations on "Slane," started with a snappy fanfare, then varied the number of instruments in play in several colorful variations of the Irish hymn of the title, diving into pungent harmonies at the close. The week began Sunday in the tent with the Festival Orchestra under music director Robert Spano. The 79-minute course of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7, inspired by Nazi Germany's lengthy siege of Leningrad, calls upon every aspect of an outsized orchestra. The professionals leading every section distinguished themselves in their moments in the spotlight, most notably percussionist Cynthia Yeh on the snare drum that dominates the long, torturous buildup of the first movement, Elaine Douvas on oboe and John Zirbel on French horn.

The full orchestra, paying close to Spano's attention to dynamics and tempo, painted a vivid picture of the siege and its human torment, reaching a well-earned climax in the finale (Joseph Pereira driving the finish on timpani) before receding into a quiet lament.

The first half of the program featured a soft-edged, quasi-pastel performance of Beethoven's first piano concerto by both the soloist, Jonathan Biss, and the orchestra.











