

THREE TIMES THREE:

An Evening of Chamber Music at Its Most Inviting



Q & A with David Finckel and Wu Han

by Matthew Gurewitsch

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On April 21, the music directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—Wu Han, piano, and David Finckel, cello—visit the MACC with the charismatic violinist Arnaud Sussmann. Their program includes three beloved piano trios, each a masterpiece in a different musical style.

In an e-mail exchange with the music writer Matthew Gurewitsch, Wu Han and David Finckel share their excitement about their work and the musical selections.

Matthew Gurewitsch: *Wu Han, pianist, and David Finckel, cellist, you've served jointly as music directors of Chamber Music Society since 2004. That's a lot of togetherness for a married couple! Do you take your work home with you?*

Wu Han and David Finckel: This is the most-asked question in our lives! The truth is: we love working together. In our positions of directorship, each of us brings different strengths to our various projects, and we truly appreciate each other's talents. We live and breathe music, and certainly take our work home, 24/7. Life is so full of excitement playing music and designing programs, we really have no time to worry about the downside.

Dancers like the public to know that their art is physically and mentally as tough as championship sports—maybe even more so. If that's true for musicians, too, how did you maintain performance readiness during the long break of the pandemic?

We were really busy during the pandemic time, leading CMS, Music@Menlo, and ArtistLed to create opportunities to support our musicians and our communities. According to our office, we have created more than 290 digital events, as well as having released eight CDs. Plus, we never really stopped playing private concerts. It is great, though, to be back to live concerts in real concert halls. Performance readiness was not a problem. It was of course at first nerve-wracking, but it did not take long to feel that we were back at home on stage.

Classical superstars like Yo-Yo Ma and Anne-Sophie Mutter typically make their careers as soloists—yet they always carve out time for chamber music. The legendary pianist Martha Argerich once told me that when you are playing by yourself, it's just too lonely up there. What, for both of you, are the great rewards of chamber music?

We fully agree with Martha Argerich. Chamber music is a joy! So much inspiration from your colleagues, so many new ideas constantly being exchanged. The friendships you form and the trust you build from making music together, that's truly the most important and rewarding experience any musicians can hope for, and that is why we have decided to devote our lives to chamber music.

The program you'll be performing on Maui with your colleague Arnaud Sussmann, violin, consists of the first piano trios of Beethoven (who wrote 12), Saint-Saëns (who wrote just two, 30 years apart), and Mendelssohn (who also wrote just two). Is there some common thread in these three very different composers' first encounter with the trio form?



Arnaud Sussmann is an extraordinary artist, so to have the chance to play piano trios with him is an honor and pleasure. This program consists of three important trios in chamber music history. Beethoven Opus one, #1, which set the stage for the beginning of major piano trio development; Saint-Saëns trio was the first important French piano trio, and the beloved Mendelssohn D minor is one of the highest musical achievements of the romantic era, full of passion, vigor, and beautiful melodies. We can't wait to play for the Maui audience.

Recently, PBS aired part one of the two-part series "Chamber Music Society Returns," title self-explanatory! Part two airs on Friday, April 15. Now that you're back out on trains and planes, are people recognizing you? Approaching you? Cheering you on?

Since returning to live concerts, we have encountered so many audience members all over the world, telling us with tears in their eyes how much music means to them, and how music has sustained them through this difficult period. It really enforced our belief in the power of music: music is a necessity in our lives, and the PBS film was an important project for us to document this intense period of struggle and triumph in chamber music.

Is it totally thrilling to be back in front of live audiences, or is it scary, too?

It's incredibly thrilling to be back at live concerts. We have witnessed now all over the country such intense electricity during performances. Audiences have such hunger for getting together, and musicians are playing with peak intensity. The pent-up energy for expression, the desire to be back to listening with like-minded people, all these things contribute to the most exciting concert experience. We hope you will join us in our Maui concert so that we can share this great music with you.

Matthew Gurewitsch, a full-time resident of Maui since 2011, is the classical-music specialist for Air Mail (www.airmail.news). Please visit his archive at www.beyondcriticism.com.