

MUSIC ACCORD

JOHN HARBISON

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano (2011)

Program Notes

Harbison wrote that his Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, composed in 2011 on a commission from Music Accord, a commissioning consortium of which The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center is a member, "is described in that way because I wish to continue to write for this combination: I worked concurrently on another sonata (No. 2?) of quite different character. The headings suggest the nature of the movements as they begin, but they often move in other directions. The boundaries between the movements are sometimes blurred. The natural pulse of musical thought, relying more on aural confidence than heady structural logic, guides the narrative. This Sonata is the second of my pieces to receive its first performance at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, 28 years after the premiere of *Twilight Music for Horn, Violin and Piano*."

Reviews

New-music fans who object when musical organizations present contemporary works in special concerts, where they won't intrude on the classics — the New York Philharmonic's Contact! series, or the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Kaplan Penthouse concerts, for example — would have approved of the way the society presented John Harbison's new Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano on Tuesday evening at Alice Tully Hall.

The work, which the society commissioned as part of a consortium, was given its world premiere at the concert by the violinist Cho-Liang Lin and the pianist Jon Kimura Parker, and it was surrounded by two staples of the Romantic canon: Beethoven's Trio in E flat (Op. 1, No. 1), for which Mr. Lin and Mr. Parker were joined by the cellist Gary Hoffman, and Brahms's Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor (Op. 60), with the violist Richard O'Neill filling out the ensemble.

Apart from the programmatic vote of confidence that surrounding Mr. Harbison with Beethoven and Brahms represents, having Mr. Lin and Mr. Parker perform in all three works afforded a measure of continuity that the society's concerts do not always have, and in a way, that was a sign of confidence as well: a way of saying that the ensemble sees Mr. Harbison as part of a historical continuum.

Mr. Harbison's sonata is substantial, if not especially groundbreaking, and though its language naturally sounds dissonant in this context, it is never much harsher than early Stravinsky. Indeed, Stravinsky appears to have been on Mr. Harbison's mind: fleeting passages have both the acidity and rhythmic jaggedness of the fiddle writing in "L'Histoire du Soldat."

But Mr. Harbison also takes a formal approach to structure, pacing and musical development that ties him to Beethoven and Brahms. His piece is in five distinct but connected movements, including a slow, lyrical aria as its heart and a closing rondo, to which Mr. Harbison appends a meditative postscript. And when Stravinsky's influence is soft-pedaled, others shine through. Some of the piano writing, for instance, is bright, rollicking and jazzy, and both musicians are given opportunities to show off their strengths and flexibility.

Mr. Lin and Mr. Parker made a strong case for the score in an energetic, unified reading. Those qualities also enlivened the Beethoven and Brahms performances, which benefited as well from the supple characterization that familiarity can bring.

— Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano

Composer: John Harbison

Instrumentation: vn, pno

Premiering Artists: Cho-Liang Lin, violin; Jon Kimura Parker, piano

Duration: 15'

[Publisher Contact](#)

[Artist Contact](#)

Cho Liang Lin official site

<http://www.cholianglin.com/>

Jon Kimura Parker official site

<http://www.jonkimuraparker.com/>

About Music Accord

Comprised of top classical music presenting organizations throughout the United States, Music Accord is a consortium that commission new works in the chamber music, instrumental recital and song genres. The Consortiums goal is to create a significant number of new works and to ensure presentation of these works in venues throughout this country and, if the occasion arises, internationally. Music Accord awards commissions principally to performers who are US citizens or reside in the US and assists these performers in selecting composers who are United States citizens or who reside in the United States.



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