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Youthful maturity

Thursday, May 22

Sharon Roffman, violin; Jon Klibonoff, piano. Mozart's Sonata in G major, K. 201; Brahms' Sonata No. 2 in D major; Prokofiev's Sonata No. 2 in D Major Op. 94a; Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen, Op. 20. Presented by the JCC on the Palisades' Thumauer School in the John Harms Center, Englewood.

By ROBERT W. BUTTS

The usual "so talented so young" types of superlatives used to reflect the talents of a young artist are not what came to mind after hearing violinist Sharon Roffman perform. With the opening notes of Mozart's charming Sonata in G Major, K. 201, there was no way of looking at this teenage woman as a mere prodigy to be trotted out like a show dog.

Immediately, one noticed the perceptive violinist. Throughout the evening (except for the final selection), Roffman refrained from showy display or exhibitionism and concentrated on sharing the music. Playing with an exceptionally clear tone that allowed even the most rapidly passing tone* to be distinctly heard, she captured the warm romantic character of Mozart's score, delightfully conveying the composition's youthful sensuality and the somewhat carefree playfulness. At times she and pianist Jon Klibonoff seemed like two children enjoying a musical game - a rather interesting accomplishment for the young violinist to play with the poise and assurance of an experienced artist in order to portray Mozart's moments of childlike wonder.

The Brahms Sonata No. 2 in D major rippled with the impassioned vigor of nineteenth century romantic fervor and glowed with characteristically Brahmsian sentiment. Unlike some musicians who take the composer's reputation for classical abstract objectivity too seriously, Roffman and Klibonoff recognized the essential duality of Brahms' creative nature. The episodes of comfortable ease and beauty are only effective when contrasted with intense subjective interpretation of the dark stormy passages. Delicate lyricism here alternated with impassioned fury to portray the rounded personality which characterizes Brahms's music. Both musicians played forcefully when called upon to emote and with exquisite tenderness when called upon to sing.

Sergei Prokofiev's dramatic Sonata No. 2 in D Major Op. 94a could easily have become the recital's show-off piece, but again Roffman and Klibonoff wisely opted to convey the depth of the Russian composer's score. Hailed by some as a modern master and condemned by others merely as a celebrated personality, the interpretation given by this duo clearly sounded in favor of viewing Prokofiev in a masterly light. Never did a phrase sound like a mere string of notes. All flowed with purpose and momentum. Harmonies, too, were focused and clear, showing cross-pollination with his two major Russian contemporaries, Stravinsky and Shostakovich.

With all the artistry behind her, Roffman finally felt ready to let loose and close with a bang. Setting her music-stand to the side and striding to stage front, she leaned toward the audience and flew into an expressive rendition of Pablo de Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen, Op. 20. Regrettably, just as she launched into the grand finale, her E-string snapped. Showing terrific poise and sense for showmanship, she smiled, excused herself, and went off-stage to change the string. When she returned, she smiled at the audience and exclaimed "I'm back." She then concluded with a flourish.