

A spiritual experience

Sharon Roffman and Jon Klibonoff in Tenafly

Sunday, October 31

Sharon Roffman (violin), Jon Klibonoff (piano).
Beethoven's Sonata No. 1 in D major, Op. 12;
Corigliano's Sonata for Violin and Piano;
Brahms' Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78;
Bach's Erbarme dich, mein Gott from St.
Matthew Passion; Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen.
JCC on the Palisades, Tenafly.

By PAUL SOMERS

Sharon Roffman drew her bow for the final ethereal tone of Brahms' G major Violin Sonata. Her arm remained poised, then slowly dropped, carrying the silence with it, allowing the music to continue in the mind. Finally her arm came to her side.

There was no applause.

Pianist Jon Klibonoff finally stood up and turned to the audience. Even then it took about a second for half-hearted applause to begin, and that produced by only a few. Most refused, for it desecrated the experience. The silence was an attempt to retain the depth of the performance.

Where did something like that come from? It came from a 20-year-old woman who I, for one, never marked as the next *Wunderkind* on the previous occasions when I heard her, including her first prize with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's Young Artist Auditions. I would never have guessed that this talented young lady would mature into the artist who would play one of the finest recitals I've ever heard. Back then I thought I was hearing someone who in the highly competitive



Sharon Roffman's violin recital was a spiritual experience which made applause at times seem cheap and inappropriate.

world of violinists would end up as a section fiddler with one of the "big 6" orchestras.

Her mother dates the sea-change in maturity from the rigors and excitement of her week of performances with the NJSO after she won the auditions. Ms. Roffman has had to work hard for what she has attained, not relying on being a public figure as a facile pre-teen. One senses that the depth now present in her playing was forged in her work ethic. After this recital it is certain that Ms. Roffman can have a solo career if she can maintain the same intense level of focus in performance after performance.

Her recital at the JCC on the Palisades was an experience of communication in which she held nothing back. She put her whole self on the line, and by the end of the first half the cord binding her and the audience was secured. In the second half she and pianist

Jon Klibonoff raised the level of artistry to a profoundly spiritual level. To have communicated her perception that restraint and self-denial are emotional, not merely stylistic, traits in the Brahms Sonata is to bring a high level of discourse to a recital. Even Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen* became an introspective meditation in which the final fireworks section acted as a transition to the outside world. When the cheering audience clearly desired an encore, the choice was not a whiz-bang finger-buster. Instead, the two players concluded with a sweet *Song Without Words* by Mendelssohn as transcribed by Fritz Kreisler.

The overall design of the concert aimed toward the exalted mood. Beethoven's Sonata No. 1 begins with a fanfare figure which immediately turns lyric. So does John Corigliano's Sonata. In Beethoven we came to understand the level of detail and personal commitment the recitalists brought to their playing. Then in Corigliano's neo-Stravinsky-ish work we heard that same attention to expressive detail applied to far more complex music.

Jon Klibonoff hardly needs introduction as a pianist. It was no surprise that in Corigliano's Sonata he played a major role, bringing an unfamiliar work to life as a sure partner with Ms. Roffman. At the conclusion of the virtuosic and humorous final Allegro there were a few whoops and hollers from the listeners.

The inclusion of this work set in motion spinning references. Corigliano uses a motive prominently which later took on a much gentler guise in the Brahms Sonata. Beyond that reference within the concert lay the overt and repeated quote in the moving **Andantino* of one of the main themes from **Bernstein's Symphony No. 2, "The Age of Anxiety."*