

Interview mit Piano Trio Marvin - Vita Kan (piano), Marina Grauman (violin), Marius Urba (violoncello)

geführt von Celia Oinas

Cecilia (C): Congratulations on winning the 2nd prize in the category piano trio of the *Franz Schubert and Modern Music* competition! How do you feel at the moment – happy, relieved...?

Marius (M): We are very happy to have won the second prize; to be somehow the best trio in the competition and still have some room to grow, to develop.

C: How did you end up together as a trio? Your trio is quite new, formed in 2016.

M: Me and Vita, my wife, did a casting (laugh) for a violinist, because we were tired of playing duos and wanted to play trios instead!

C: Could you tell me a little about how you prepared yourself for this particular competition?

Vita (V): It was a very easy system: when we had time, we rehearsed. It was practical and it worked (laughs).

M: It is very important to both practice by ourselves and then rehearse together. This combination is important – not just to rehearse or practice. It has to be both.

C: Do you have any piano trio role models?

V: For each work, there is a different one. We try to take the best ideas from the best ensembles.

C: Let's talk a little about your programming. Your choice of the competition repertoire reflected the title "Schubert und die Musik der Moderne" very well since, apart from

Schubert, all the other pieces you played were 20th or 21st century music. Was this a deliberate choice?

M: Yes. Our idea for this competition was to create contrasts, as opposed to creating a mixture of Modern, Romantic and Classical pieces.

V: In the finals, we could have had a Romantic piece as well, but the competition offered a chance to show the development of modern piano trio music in the 20th century. So for instance, there is a 40-year-difference between Shostakovich and Vasks, but you can also hear that Vasks knows Shostakovich...

C: And it was also nice that you had Shostakovich's first trio (first round) which isn't played that often.

M: We feel quite connected to the music of the Soviet era, especially Shostakovich, since we all have Russian-Soviet roots in some form; we were all born in the Soviet Union, but of course we are very young and didn't live in the system – for God's sake! We are deeply attached to Shostakovich's music, his intense atmosphere, all what he was living through. Of course, Shostakovich was just one of them, since there were many other composers who had a similarly very hard time. We recently had a project on students of Shostakovich, some scarcely known great composers nobody knows, for example Georgy Sviridov...

Marina: ...or German Galynin. In their music you can also hear the sorrow, sadness, and the hard life people had.

C: There is so much music to be rediscovered... Could you also say a little about the compulsory piece, "Stück 2" by Junjig Kim?

Marina: It was difficult, but you could also see that the composer really thought about how the musicians would realize it. It was not like "I just write something complex", it was well-structured, and we were happy about that. But it didn't make it easier to play!

C: The formal sections were quite clear, marked by tempo changes. One of the difficulties was not just the special playing techniques but also the fact that you had to play so many of the gestures exactly at the same time.

M: Basically, everything was syncopated, and yet there was no pulse, no “1, 2, 3”, which you could have played the syncopations against.

V: And the work also required some type of improvising on the stage, because you really need to concentrate on your partners in order to instantly react somehow.

C: So, you think that when you have a piece like this, there is actually room for spontaneity on stage?

M: There is room for spontaneity in the interpretation when you have this kind of mathematical chaos. There were moments in the work when it seemed there was no system at all!

C: These various kinds of sound combinations Kim wanted to create, in which everybody has some special playing technique, were really exciting from a listener’s point of view. Are you familiar with these kinds of playing techniques?

V: We become more and more familiar with each modern piece.

M: The more competitions you play the more familiar you become. Every competition includes a piece like this. There are no recordings and you cannot just learn it fast by listening. You really have to take time.

C: Finally, let’s talk a little about Schubert trios as well. For the second round, you chose the B-flat major trio – was it an obvious choice or did you have a hard time deciding between E-flat and B-flat?

M: For us personally, I think the B-flat major trio was more fitting because it shows more the characters of each instrument and is quite well-balanced – not just the violin playing

everything and the cello has nothing (disagreement from other members). They say that it is the same with the other trio, but I think the B-flat major trio is even more challenging.

C: Indeed when you play trios by earlier composers such as Haydn or Mozart the cello is mostly doubling the piano's bass line, but with Schubert it is already a different story... What do you find most difficult when playing Schubert?

Marina: The easiness. There is actually not so much to play but it needs to sound natural, like you are creating it now, in the moment. I don't know, it is like flowing, but it is difficult to explain...

M: When you start to play Schubert, everything is so nice and easy, you think maybe this is the right way to play, not to think a lot. But then when you begin to think more, it gets complicated!

C: So, like there is a lot of practicing beforehand but when you are on stage it has to sound spontaneous?

M: Yes, to let it go.

V: It is really hard to play it light.

C: Do you agree or rather disagree a lot when you practice together?

Marina & Vita: Yes, it happens every time!

M: We disagree a lot, and then we agree after some time.

C: And since you two are a couple (Marius and Vita) you probably say your opinions really honestly.

M: ...we keep disagreeing at home after the rehearsal. It goes on forever!

C: Ok, now I understand why you needed a third person to balance things out! The Vasks trio was a new piece to me, but I listened to it with delight. What kind of narrative is portrayed by the work?

Marina: It was also a new piece for us. We started to rehearse it only two months ago. But the first time we heard the piece we immediately thought: yes, we need to play this.

V: Every movement has its own character, they are in a way hommages to Messiaen, and Vasks has described everything in detail.

Marius: Vasks has a really personal way of writing. It is really something new, not just another contemporary composer. You can hear Vasks' music on the radio, and you will immediately recognize it is him.

C: One last question: what are your future plans?

Vita: There are some concerts coming up and competitions too. We continue working a lot and also begin chamber music studies at the University of Arts Berlin with Artemis Quartet – now it's official!

C: Congratulations on that too, and thank you very much for this interview!