



Kennedy Center Debut of

miXt

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MiXt Trio Delivers Freewheeling Program at Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater

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Technical perfection is almost a given among young classical musicians these days; even the most newly minted graduates can toss off virtuosic works with ease. But it's not as easy to find players who embody the sheer joy of making music, which made Tuesday's debut performance by miXt — a trio of award-winning soloists from the Young Concert Artists organization — such a remarkable evening. In their freewheeling program at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater, the players caromed happily from klezmer to Schubert to ragtime to 20th-century modernism, bringing sophistication, imagination and down-to-earth exuberance to everything they played.

Much of that was due to the extroverted Spanish clarinetist Jose Franch-Ballester, whose wit and virtuosity were quickly apparent in Bela Bartok's "Contrasts." It's a work from 1938 that bristles with prewar edginess and bite, but Franch-Ballester brought an agreeable warmth to the work, giving the slow "Piheno" movement a kind of serene luminosity, and deepening the sly, ironic jauntiness in the closing "Sebes."

The lyrical "Three Nocturnes" by Kevin Puts (a former YCA composer in residence) that followed received an even more impressive performance, from the quietly exalting clarinet lines of the con moto to the otherworldly grandeur of the molto adagio, played with great subtlety and insight by pianist Ran Dank.

Violinist Bella Hristova put her ferocious virtuosity on display in Schubert's spirited Rondo in B minor, D. 895, but the real excitement came in the closing works. As Dank churned out the strutting ragtime rhythms of John Novacek's "Four Rags for Two Jons," Franch-Ballester unleashed soaring, exuberant lines on the clarinet, tossing in foot-stomping, finger-snapping and the occasional shout as needed. He's a born showman with a big, rich sound, and Paul Schoenfield's "Trio" — inspired by Hasidic music — let the three cut loose with a wild, uninhibited performance that brought the audience to its feet.