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## Hadelich gives a serious, stirring recital

By Joshua Kosman



Photo: Courtesy Photo

Violinist Augustin Hadelich has risen to prominence slowly.

News about Augustin Hadelich has been spreading slowly but inexorably over the past few years, as audiences become increasingly aware of the integrity and imagination of the young German violinist's playing. He made an impressive debut with the San Francisco Symphony in 2013, gave a handful of solo recitals in the area, and recently won a Grammy for his recording of Dutilleux's violin concerto "L'arbre des songs."

In his return to San Francisco on Monday, March 13, Hadelich left no doubt that he's a violinist of the first order, boasting iron technique and probing intellectual fervor. But he also, perhaps, made it clear why his rise to prominence has been such a gradual process.

Appearing in Herbst Theatre alongside the excellent pianist Joyce Yang in a recital presented by Chamber Music San Francisco, Hadelich moved easily across a range of repertoire, from Mozart and Beethoven sonatas to a recent work by the Australian composer Brett Dean. The partnership was clearly an effective one, with the two performers seeing eye to eye on matters of tempo, mood and dramatic emphasis.

And the seriousness with which Hadelich seems to approach everything he tackles paid wondrous dividends throughout. Beethoven's G-Major Sonata, Op. 30, No. 3, sounded structurally sturdy as well as lithe in its phrasing. Stravinsky's "Divertimento," drawn from the composer's Tchaikovskian pastiche "The Fairy's Kiss," was at once energetically extroverted — especially in the vivacious variations of the final movement — and carefully weighted.

Yet Hadelich never makes things easy for the listener, and he offers few concessions to sensual delight or straightforward entertainment. (Few, but not none — the encore, Jascha Heifetz's arrangement of Manuel Ponce's song "Estrellita," was a short, sumptuous burst of irresistible schmaltz.)

The sounds he draws from the violin are more steely than plush; they speak more eloquently of rigor and precision than of expressive ardor. And the unshakable determination with which Hadelich plans out each episode and each moment of an interpretation can sometimes feel constraining.

Yet the pleasures of Monday's performance far outweighed these reservations. In particular, Mozart's Sonata in A, K. 305, was a marvel — taut, elegant and wonderfully graceful. Here was a case where the fastidious attention to detail displayed by both performers resulted in a performance of sparkling clarity.

Dean's piece, "Berlin Music," was composed for Midori in 2010 and emerged as a rather creepy musical fun house in five short, dense movements. Dean is fond of pursuing single ideas to their extremes — a slow, eerie lullaby built around a high-pitched, keening melodic motif, say, or a stretch of repetitive passagework muted to evoke musicians practicing in the next room. The music didn't make much of an impression, but Hadelich and Yang gave it their full commitment.

