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Impressive duo

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Special Writer

I have heard cellist Erik Asgeirsson perform a number of times when he played in this area. He has great talent, which came upon him just about when he was born. His mother is pianist extraordinaire Pauline Martin, who has had a very great educational effect on both of her sons, Erik and Leif.

The Tuesday Musicale has taken an active interest in Erik, as he was a member of their Student League for several years, and on May 10, they honored him in their annual Artist Concert. When I last heard Asgeirsson perform a few years ago, he was quite impressive even then, on a relatively routine cello. But this past Tuesday he played on a more expensive instrument that allowed him to bring out more richness of expression. Works by Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Faure, Martinu and Franck were featured on that program. The opening piece — the Nocturne Op. 19 No. 4 by Tchaikovsky — is among the small-scale chamber works that he wrote. The rich tone and deep expressiveness in this performance elevated it beyond its size.

This was followed by Beethoven's Cello Sonata in D major Op. 102, No. 2, the latest of Beethoven's five cello sonatas. In many of Beethoven's late works, while looking forward in style and sound, he was also looking backward towards Bach by incorporating the fugue in his music. This sonata is one such work, the final movement of which superimposes an enormous fugue onto what was then a futuristic style. The skill and coordination required for this work are substantial, and were presented impressively in this performance.

Gabriel Faure, like Cesar Franck, compensated for his short output in terms of quantity with outstanding quality in the few works that are heard. His Elegie for cello and piano was originally intended as a movement of a cello sonata which he never completed, but it is a musical gem in its own right.

Bohuslav Martinu is among the composers of substance whose music does not receive the exposure it deserves. His Variations on a Theme by Rossini is an enticing and challenging work for both instruments. The Rossini theme — from his opera "Moses" — is the only segment from that opera that is popular today.

The Cello and Piano Sonata by Franck was originally written for violin and piano, but has been transcribed for several different instruments over the years. The cello version did already exist, however, during the composer's life, and is quite common today. The music is rather challenging, in particular the second movement's fast and knuckle breaking piano part. The final movement is one of Franck's brightest ones, using canonic imitative form. This performance elicited a rave applause and a standing ovation.

The Martin-Asgeirsson collaboration constitutes an impressive duo team, but it seems that each of them is capable of beating his or her own path. Their performance in this prestigious series did an honor to its tradition, which has featured artists such as Paderewski, MacDowell, Damrosch and Gabilowitsch in the distant past.