

BRINGING THE PAST TO LIFE; A HOME CONCERT WITH STEPHANIE TRICK AND PAOLO ALDERIGHI

By Gary Rametta

Take a venue sprinkled with collectibles of musical furniture from Americana, combine that with two stellar pianists who specialize in American period music, and you have a match made in heaven—and an easy sell to boot.

Amidst a display of music boxes, piano rolls, an orchestrion, a player piano and one handsome, 1925 Steinway grand reproducing piano, a standing room-only assemblage of patrons and like-minded appreciators were treated to a memorable home concert featuring Stephanie Trick and Paolo Alderighi.



Early 20th-century music box on display



Stephanie is well known to ragtime audiences as a specialist in the Harlem stride style and, more recently, the boogie-woogie and jazz idioms. She's been a featured performer on the U.S. ragtime circuit since her early teens. Now 26, she tours internationally, especially in Europe where she keeps a busy schedule. That's also where she met her husband and musical partner, Paolo Alderighi, I gathered.

A native of Milan, Italy, Paolo is a music conservatory graduate with—like Stephanie—classical training and a jones for jazz. In addition to his regular performance schedule with Stephanie and other ensembles, he is a faculty member at Bocconi University in Milan, teaching jazz studies.



Introducing himself and laying out the context for the concert, Paolo was only slightly tongue-in-cheek when he confided that he and Stephanie “are becoming superstars.” The audience shared in the levity, but Paolo was being sincere in his explanation that the four-handed technique he and Stephanie have worked out and applied to classic jazz, swing, ragtime, stride, etc., is unique, has been well received and is in hot demand.

The truth of that assertion became evident as the pair launched into an array of rags, jazz and swing standards, popular songs and improvisations. It wasn't that the pieces they chose were all that unusual—After You've Gone, Ain't Misbehavin', When You and I Were Young, Sentimental Journey, Handful of Keys, Stop-Time Rag, Grandpa's Spells, Bill Bailey, etc.—it's that the WAY they played them was so interesting and enjoyable. And not only a matter of their individual styles (which are more than impressive), but the carefully conceived positioning of their four hands, and the voicings, harmonic/melodic lines, and rhythms each one undertakes; resulting in fresh arrangements of these works.

In this concert, Paolo took the low- to mid-region of the piano, with Stephanie at the middle and upper end. But their hands are often crossed; Stephanie's left is positioned below Paolo's right, meaning that both players

CONCERT REVIEW



The enjoyment Stephanie and Paolo get playing together adds to the quality of the music they produce. Photo ©2013, Ed Cooley

start with a wider-than-usual hand span. This allows them to “stack” or “layer” voicings, and translates to a wider, more expansive sound.

One of the things I liked was that they found a way to eliminate polyphony, meaning there aren't a lot of duplicated notes; a common pitfall in four-handed piano playing. Also, in terms of technique, both have an impeccable sense of time and tempo, and their individual styles combine very well.

Although each knows and displays all the requisite stride figures and tricks, Stephanie is stronger and more facile with the ragtime and stride styles, complementing it with a light, precise touch, amazing speed and dexterity, and minimal pedal damping. Her work on Fats Waller's “Handful of Keys” and Donald Lambert's treatment of “Pilgrim's Chorus” from Wagner's opera “Tannhauser” was a joy to witness. At times I closed my eyes and could swear I was listening to Dick Hyman...not that she's derivative, but that she's that good!

Paolo produces a bigger tone with greater depth, and to me evidenced a more intricate harmonic sense and kinship with the blues. His hands are generally in the prototypical “holding an egg” position, which is second nature to classical musicians. He is equally dexterous with multiple-note runs, which to me illustrates a ton of experience playing cadenzas and scalar passages à la Mozart.

The concert wasn't just fast stride and ragtime. There was a lot of variety and musical moods. Some of the unexpected highlights for me included an “Italian samba-style” treatment of Fats' “I Wish I Were Twins,” an homage to Nat King Cole on “L.O.V.E.,” a solo by Paolo on “Silent Night” (it was holiday time, after all) that showcased his harmonic inventiveness, romantic classical influences (Chopin, Liszt), and jazz rhythmic sense. Also, in the early part of the program they played a marvelously crafted, New Orleans Marching Band-styled version of “Just a Closer Walk With Thee.” And an improvised boogie to open the second half of the program highlighted Stephanie's considerable savvy with the idiom.

To see Stephanie live (including dates playing four-hand piano with Paolo), check out her schedule page at: <http://stephanietrick.com/schedule.htm>. While there, you can also browse her CDs page and find, among others, “Two For One,” the excellent four-hand album she and Paolo recorded.



*The audience was the victor at this concert.
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