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MUSIC REVIEW

Burnished Tones Evoke Ravel and Others in a Candlelit Room

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"We prefer our audiences to be intoxicated," the Canadian violinist James Ehnes said before his recital at the Kaplan Penthouse on Saturday evening, part of the Mostly Mozart Festival's Little Night Music series.

Mr. Ehnes introduced his program — to an audience drinking wine at candlelit tables — by pointing out that all the works were written in the 20th century, with no particular connection to Mozart.

Certainly no alcohol was needed to appreciate Mr. Ehnes's artistry, apparent from the first notes of Kreisler's Praeludium and Allegro, which opened the concert. One enjoyable aspect of this late-night series, always a highlight of the summer season, is the chance to savor the playing of first-class musicians in an intimate setting instead of a vast concert hall.

In Mr. Ehnes's case there was plenty to enjoy — with the Kreisler notable for its dynamic subtleties and expressive shadings complimented by an effortless virtuosity. Next came Elgar's Violin Sonata in E minor, in which he was accompanied elegantly by the pianist Andrew Armstrong.

Elgar wrote the infrequently performed work during a period of depression and illness at the end of World War II. While it is not as immediately appealing as his Cello Concerto and other more popular

works, Mr. Ehnes and Mr. Armstrong made an eloquent case for the sonata with their expressive interpretation, which highlighted its vulnerable and passionate moments.

Mr. Ehnes's virtuosity and burnished tone were also displayed to fine effect in a performance of Ravel's "Tzigane" (written first for violin and piano and later orchestrated), which concluded the program. Ravel's gentle "Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré," the first encore, offered a mellow contrast, as did Kreisler's arrangement of Cyril Scott's "Lotus Land."

There were overtones of Ravel earlier on Saturday as well, when Mr. Ehnes, making his festival debut, offered a nuanced rendition of Barber's Violin Concerto with the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, conducted by Louis Langrée, at Avery Fisher Hall.

Barber, whose centennial is being celebrated this year, imbued the sweeping lyricism of the second movement with Ravelian colors and the whirlwind concluding Presto with a

Ravelian sense of fantasy. Both soloist and orchestra effectively conveyed the diverse moods, with fine contributions from the oboist Randall Ellis.

As an encore Mr. Ehnes rewarded the enthusiastic audience with a striking performance of Paganini's Caprice No. 16.

Mr. Langrée began the program with Webern's orchestration of the Ricercare from Bach's "Musical Offering." The concert concluded on a fiery note with an inspired performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, painted in broad brush strokes and vivid contrasts.



Richard Termine for The New York Times

The Canadian violinist James Ehnes, left, with the pianist Andrew Armstrong at Kaplan Penthouse on Saturday evening.