

Review - The 5 Browns

Unique. It is a word often tossed around, more often than not incorrectly paired with some sort of qualifier, such as "truly", "remarkably", or "unusually". Yet the word unique means just that, *unique*, needing no other descriptors. The 5 Browns is a unique group. Five siblings playing in a band is not unique, true, but five who all attended Julliard simultaneously and all play the same instrument (piano) on stage at once, that is unique, and the very full theatre at KCT had the pleasure of hearing these young musicians last Tuesday. The quintet consists of Ryan, Melody, Deondra, Desirae, and Gregory, each one very accomplished and displaying their own personality throughout the concert. Given the season, their selections leaned towards Christmas music, with some very beautiful renditions of traditional tunes, particularly the solos of "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" and "Silent Night", played by Ryan and Gregory Brown respectively.

The audience however did not attend to hear a solo piano, and there were some truly shining moments when all five were playing with a precision and synchronicity that set aside any concerns I might have had with five pianos being played at once. My personal favourite of the night was "The Sorcerer's Apprentice", but the arrangements of "Star Wars Suite", "Skater's Waltz" (a crowd favourite) and "Sleigh Ride" were all wonderfully rendered, displaying a full range of abilities by all players and an amazing level of subtle communication. One version that stood out was a two part version of the overture from the Nutcracker Suite, to close the first half. Deondra and Ryan first gave us a traditional interpretation, after which the other three came on stage to have the quintet play a modern version, with a swing feel.

I really liked this juxtaposition. I did overhear some people expressing dislike at "messing with" music they know. As an improviser myself, I think it's always interesting to explore music from a different angle. After all, the great composers whom we hold sacred, were all improvisors and chances are you wouldn't have heard their music played the same way every time when they were alive. Add that to the fact that one can't imagine much has been written or arranged for five pianos, and you are guaranteed to hear something new. The encore was a great example, "Flight of the Bumblebee", short, sweet and played cleanly, amazing on five pianos.

They've played Carnegie Hall, and around the world, from China to France, and now to our little town. I'm sorry they couldn't bring their 5 concert grand pianos (there was concern at transporting \$780,000 worth of pianos over the Coq in winter...) but I'm very glad they played here. Hopefully this unique quintet will be able to return to our stage soon.