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## Tenor and violin in a charmingly eclectic double bill

By Joshua Kosman Updated 1:27 pm PST, Monday, February 26, 2018



IMAGE 1 OF 3

Tenor Michael Schade sang works rarely heard anymore.



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Long ago, in days gone by, there used to be a popular form of musical recital in which a star performer, or a handful of them, could trot out a quasi-random assortment of material. Popular ditties, vocal and instrumental numbers, operatic excerpts — all were grist for the programming mill.

The premise was that the performers themselves were the draw no matter their material, which is why this concert genre mostly lives on today in the form of showcases for superstars like Plácido Domingo. But it got an enjoyable revival in Herbst

Theatre on Saturday, Feb. 24, in a joint recital by tenor Michael Schade and violinist Livia Sohn.

Presented by Chamber Music San Francisco, this was announced by Schade as “an unashamed



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Schade sang lieder by Mozart, Schubert and Strauss, as well as a pair of Handel arias that benefited in particular from the clarion brilliance of his top notes (“Sound an Alarm,” from the oratorio “Judas Maccabeus,” got the evening off to an especially vibrant start).

Sohn, meanwhile, took care of the operatic side of things, tearing her way through instrumental arrangements and virtuoso treatments of music from Bizet’s “Carmen,” Tchaikovsky’s “Eugene Onegin,” Gershwin’s “Porgy and Bess” and others. A noble, dramatically intense version of music from Verdi’s “I Lombardi” at the beginning of the second half found her at her most forcefully engaging.

There was a specific historical model underlying the entire project, one that went beyond the general notion of a hodgepodge recital program. That was the collaboration in the early decades of the 20th century between the Irish tenor John McCormack and the great violin virtuoso Fritz Kreisler — a partnership that drew enormous crowds for their touring appearances and produced some of the runaway best-sellers of the early days of the record industry.

That may not have been the canniest comparison to draw — Schade, for all the brilliance and sweetness of his sound, is no McCormack, and Sohn no Kreisler. Yet the decision paid off most tellingly in a section of little-known music associated with the performers’ great forebears.

Happy as I was to hear Strauss and Bizet, those are selections that one runs across regularly in the concert hall. But how often do we hear an excerpt from “Jocelyn,” an 1888 opera by the French composer Benjamin Godard?

Never, that’s how often. And although the sentimental strains of the title character’s “Lullaby” might cloy with repeated listening, that aria — its arching melody delivered by Schade with unerring grace, complemented by Sohn’s delicate violin counterpoint — proved a revelation. The moment opened a brief window onto the kind of meltingly expressive repertoire that once held the stage and delighted countless listeners — and that did so again on this occasion.

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**Michael Schade and Livia Sohn:** 7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 26. Oshman Family Jewish Community Center, 3921 Fabian Way, Palo Alto. \$42-\$60. (415) 392-4400.

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