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"BEYOND WORDS"

Chamber music became topical Monday night when the Opus One piano quartet gave the world premiere of Stephen Hartke's "Beyond Words" at Carnegie Music Hall.

The American composer's music, which addresses feelings raised by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, was part of a Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society program that also included a rarity from the classical era and a masterpiece by Johannes Brahms.

"Beyond Words" was a co-commission by Opus One and the Pittsburgh and Cleveland chamber music societies. Hartke was working on a different piece for Monday night's premiere, incidental music for imaginary dramas, but had written only sketches before Sept. 11.

The concert opened with music by Johann Nepomuk Hummel, a prodigy who lived with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Vienna, Austria, while taking lessons.

Opus One gave an illuminating performance of the two-movement Piano Quartet in D major, probably written in the 1790s after a European tour with his father and unpublished until recently.

Pianist Anne-Marie McDermott's superbly Mozartean touch and phrasing made the first movement's charms memorable. The agitation of the second movement was forcefully presented, and the anti-climactic final phrase was tossed off with droll precision to elicit soft chuckles from the audience.

Brahms' Third Piano Quartet most fully demonstrated the mastery of Opus One. The slow movement, an Andante, sings of youthful love and was written 20 years before the composition was completed. The nuances of violinist Ida Kavafian and cellist Peter Wiley were especially caressing.

The encore was a truly delightful treat, the athletic third movement of Antonin Dvorak's Second Piano Quartet. McDermott was especially impressive as she boldly presented a contrasting melody

that has special harmonic coloration and fairly bubbled in another passage.

– Mark Kanny