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Late Edition

New York: Today, mostly sunny, high 72. Tonight, increasing clouds, low 49. Tomorrow, variable clouds with some sunshine, high 70. Yesterday, high 58, low 36. Weather map is on page D5.

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MUSIC REVIEW

A Viola Soloist (a Rarity), And a Bernsteinian Pianist

By ANTHONY TOMMASINI

Not many violists have been able to sustain a solo career. The instrument has never been able to shake its perception as a bridge between the bright-toned, assured violin and the deeper, plaintive cello, both of which, unlike the viola, have extensive solo repertoires.

Ori Kam, a 23-year-old California-born violist who grew up in Israel, is staking out a solo career, and he may be one of the few violists to achieve it.

Mr. Kam presented an impressive recital on Sunday afternoon at Weill Recital Hall, the result of his winning the 1999 Young Musicians Excellence Award from the Daniel Kuhn Foundation. His solo career has been building steadily since his debut at 18 with the Israel Philharmonic under the baton of Zubin Mehta.

Like most violists Mr. Kam luxuriates in the viola's dusky, warm tone, less radiant than the violin's but more mellow. But he never lets his sound become smothering. In Schubert's "Arpeggione" Sonata he brought shapely phrasing to the wistful first movement, unmannered tenderness to the songful Adagio and a supple rhythmic play to the undulant finale. Mr. Kam is resourceful but not flawless technician. Here and there his bow slipped on a string. But the lack of flashiness was refreshing, and his musical integrity was consistently rewarding.

These qualities were abetted by the Israeli pianist Ilan Rechtman. In the next work, Hindemith's Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 11, No. 4 (from 1919), Mr. Rechtman's accomplished playing was pivotal to the performance's success, for this piano part is one of the most awkward in the duo sonata repertoire.

The sonata is the work of a 23-year-old composer with a toehold on the late Romantic style of Brahms but a vision directed piercingly into the experimental future. The first movement, an elusive fantasy, is followed by two sets of variations, which rang in style from a simple setting of a folkloric melody, to a biting sarcastic dance and a heavy-footed fugue. Bringing unity to this episodic work is a challenge, and this organic performance met it fully.

Mr. Rechtman's own work, "Three Movements Dedicated to the Memory of Leonard Bernstein," came next. Through the music's shifting meters, jazzy rhythms and nostalgic spans of sweet tonality, Mr. Rechtman may have been trying to evoke Bernstein's stylistic eclecticism. The music seemed highly derivative, though the performance had impetuosity.

The program concluded with Brahms's Sonata, Op. 120, No. 1. Mr. Kam's playing at once mature and youthfully exuberant. He is an attractive, engaging presence onstage, which should only help his quest for a solo career.



Toby Wales

Ori Kam, violist, and Ilan Rechtman at Weill Recital Hall on Sunday.