ON OCTOBER 28TH, I HAD THE RARE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR A PERFORMANCE BY THE CARR-PETROVA DUO AT CARNEGIE HALL'S WEILL RECITAL HALL. I WILL STATE, MOST EMPHATICALLY AND ON THE RECORD, THAT I FOUND THE PERFORMANCE TO BE CATEGORICALLY ASTONISHING IN ITS BEAUTY, ENSEMBLE, ARTISTRY, QUALITY OF SOUND, AND ALMOST UNCANNY ABILITY TO DRAW INTO THE MUSIC, DESPITE THE PROGRAM'S UNFAMILIAR CHOICES IN REPERTOIRE.

First, I would note that the Carr-Petrova Duo, (Molly Carr, Viola and Anna Petrova, Piano) aside from being an eponymous moniker, is a true description. This was not a “solo with piano accompaniment” duo — it was a collaboration of equals, and titans to boot. Although they have indeed performed together for several years, they play as though they have performed daily for decades. Every nuance, every shadow, every explosive climax was perfectly together, balanced at all times, and impeccably musical. And they pulled that off in each of the pieces they performed.

Carr and Petrova brought this recital to Weill as the culmination of their “Novel Voices Refugee Aid Project,” aimed at bringing the culture of classical chamber music into direct contact with the culture of refugees throughout the world. It is their consummate artistry combined with a tireless zeal that makes such a confluence possible. They brought that same artistry and zeal to their performance. The Duo was dressed in gorgeous hand-designed and crafted gowns made in Kenya by the refugee girls and women of RefuSHE. Additionally, they announced from the stage that the proceeds of the concert would be donated to two of the non-profit organizations they partnered with through their Project.
Their Mozart — oh wait, they did not play any Mozart — but Mozart would have listened intently to their utterly transparent rendition of the Weinberg (Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 28). I will not attempt a superficial musical analysis of the Weinberg, because no such analysis was necessary in the face of the Carr-Petrova performance. You would have been convinced, without any analysis, that you just heard something deeply moving and musical.

The Novel Voices Refugee Aid Project also had a resident composer, Fernando Arroyo Lascurain, whose work entitled “Novel Voices” was given its world premiere at this recital. Some new music composers, in their desperate attempt to be contemporary, write things that look good (to them) on paper, but end up sounding like an unpleasant vehicular pile-up on the Queensboro Bridge. Mr. Lascurain is not one of those composers. His work brought together fresh musical ideas gleaned from his contact with actual persons, real refugees, and a consummate craftsmanship. The result, again convincingly performed by Carr and Petrova, was nothing less than wonderful. It deserves to join the list of rare, wonderful repertoire for violists.

The only work on the program that might have been remotely familiar to anyone in the audience was the Khachaturian “Lullaby” from the Gayaneh ballet. As further evidence of the Carr-Petrova Duo’s mastery of their art, the Lullaby was their own arrangement. You would think the purpose of a lullaby is to induce a soporific disconnect, but this had the distinctly opposite effect.

The final work was the Op. 13 Sonata for Viola and Piano by Lowell Liebermann. This performance was indescribable. The piece is remarkably complex, stupendously difficult, jarringly dissonant and lyrically melodic, all at the same time. Carr and Petrova brought their astonishing musicianship and power to the forefront, and never let go.

If you ever have occasion to hear the Carr-Petrova Duo perform, anywhere, anytime, do not pass up the opportunity, or you may, in fact, be deprived of it — this debut recital was to a packed hall.