

Christina & Michelle Naughton

PIANO

Washington Post: There's no such thing as sibling rivalry for the Naughton piano duo

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The only moments not in sync during pianists Christina and Michelle Naughton's Sunday recital at the Kennedy Center arrived before and after every piece, in the form of staggered bows before an adoring audience. The bows served as visual reminders that the twin sisters — who recently became the first piano duo recipients of Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Career Grants — are each talented musicians in their own right yet when together become a perfect storm.

Seated side-by-side in pastel rose and yellow gowns, the duo charged into Poulenc's rhythmic Sonata for Piano Four-Hands, creating an intensely accented opening movement while showcasing an assured palette of colors and textures on the Steinway. This duo has become known for its synchronous technique and musicality. Another hallmark is their aching lyricism, phrases pouring from their fingers as smooth as fondant. Those qualities turned Schubert's Allegro in A Minor for Piano Four-Hands, D. 947, into a confection of contrasts, from translucent trills in the treble to chorale-like sections accompanied by a bass filigree with the strength of iron.

The Naughtons' meticulous and powerful pianism was brought to bear in Paul Schoenfield's "Five Days From the Life of a Manic Depressive." In this five-movement work from 2006, the duo pulsed through jazzy riffs, chords and glissandos, jabbed their way through stilted rhythms, picked out singular melodies and rippled through the frenzied boogie with ease and control.

When performing on separate instruments, as they did in Debussy's "En blanc et noir" and Rachmaninoff's Suite No. 2 for Two Pianos, Op. 17, the duo's synchronicity only increased. Unison notes on disparate keyboards sounded as one, ringing like distant bells, while at other times, the melodic material entwined so much that the two pianos became indistinguishable.

By Grace Jean | The Washington Post