

# The Boston Musical Intelligencer

## Radius Charms

by Susan Miron  
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Although this is Radius Ensemble's 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season, it was the first concert of theirs I managed to attend. Longy's Pickman Hall was packed, and I, not-quite-geriatric, felt like one of the oldest people in the audience. Radius is clearly doing something right to attract such a large, youthful following.

Like other local chamber music groups, Radius Ensemble combines old favorites with new, accessible, fun repertoire. Before each piece, someone about to play (in each case here, the woodwind player) would talk about the piece, the instruments, and/or composer. It would seem I am in the minority of people who would just like to hear the music, no friendly chatter, please. But who am I to complain if it brings young people into concert halls? If this listener-friendly approach charms people into attending classical music concerts, so be it.

Saturday evening's performance featured the Brahms Horn Trio, one of the gems of the chamber music repertoire, along with two pieces with harp—one familiar, the other a real find—and a set of ten miniatures for clarinet and cello. The Horn Trio is not performed nearly often enough, and I was thrilled to see it on a program.

The evening opened with an enchanting novelty, Nino Rota's 1945 "Quintet" (for Flute, Oboe, Viola, Cello, and Harp). Rota's (1911-1979) fame stems mostly from his 150 film scores (especially by Fellini and Visconti, including "Romeo and Juliet," "The Godfather," "Amacord") for which he won acclaim. He also wrote some lovely, if not terribly memorable, pieces for harp. His "Sarabande e Toccata" (1945) was standard repertoire for harpists in the 1970s and 80s, and he also wrote a rather bland piece that gets played occasionally for flute and harp. He really understood how to write for the instrument, and his deftly written harp writing was played with great beauty by guest artist Ina Zdorovetchi. Apparently Radius, founded by oboist Jennifer Montbach, had played this piece once before. I'd be happy any time to hear it again. The piece is suffused with rich, low harp chords and a multitude of harp harmonics, with skillfully idiomatic writing for each of the other instruments. A very pleasant piece, played beautifully by all: Sarah Brady, flute; Jennifer Montbach, oboe; Noriko Futagami Herndon, viola; Miriam Bolkoksy, cello.

The real treat of the evening came next in a combination I usually try to avoid hearing, the over-popular duo of flute and harp. I had heard Astor Piazzolla's (1921-1992) four-movement *Histoire du Tango* (1986) twice before on harp with flute or violin, and had found it rather dull. An immensely popular piece, it exists on YouTube for Oboe and Marimba, and an array of other combinations, but was originally written—very idiomatically—for flute and guitar. Recently it's become popular on the harp, but is immensely challenging, partly because of its constant chromaticism.

The composition takes us on a journey through time, tracing the history of how the tango evolved from the dance floor up to the concert stage. Its movements are Bordel 1900, Café 1930, Night-Club 1960, and Concert d'Aujourd'hui 1990.

Flutist Sarah Brady and harpist Ina Zdorovetchi gave it the performance of a lifetime—spectacular from beginning to end, and enlivened by their dauntless virtuosity and musicality. These two are destined to duo, and I eagerly look forward to hearing them again.

*Ten Images* (2001) by Luna Pearl Woolf (b. 1973) featured very short (30 seconds to 2 minutes in length) atonal duets for clarinet and cello, played charmingly by Eran Egozy and Miriam Bolkosky. Each also had a solo. A fun piece.

The Brahms Trio in E-flat, Op. 40, performed by Anne Howarth, horn, Charles Dimmick, violin, and Sarah Bob, piano, ended the program. Before the piece, Howarth gave an excellent demonstration of the mechanics of the modern horn, from which this writer, a harpist, learned a great deal. Brahms (1833-1897) actually wrote this for the traditional valveless Waldhorn (forest or hunting horn) instead of the new, valved “French horns.” The young Brahms heard his father play this instrument, and apparently liked its “from afar quality” according to Brahms biographer Jan Swafford. The Trio is an unabashedly romantic, elegiac, and gorgeous piece, written, many believe, as a wordless requiem for Brahms’ beloved mother who died early in 1865, the same year he also began composing *Ein deutsches Requiem*.

The performance was a strange one, partly because of the peculiar placement of accents throughout by the pianist. I’ve heard the acclaimed pianist Sarah Bob (who also runs an excellent series of her own, New Gallery Concert Series), several times playing contemporary music, and have always been impressed. Here, however, I found her interpretation of the piano part to be quite strange. Howarth and Dimmick played well. The lyrical third movement, Adagio mesto, received a moving performance by all.

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