

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

Radius Ensemble Connects

by David Griesinger
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Radius Ensemble gave us a brilliant combination of music and performances last night in the Pickman Auditorium at the Longy School of Music. The goal was to bring unfamiliar music to a wider audience. Radius succeeded in spades, and the sequence of the pieces was just as important as the choice of music, particularly for the first two pieces on the program.

They opened with an arrangement (2010) by clarinetist and composer Jonathan Russell of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* ("The Rite of Spring," 1913) for wind quintet. Jennifer Montbach, Radius's artistic director and oboist, introduced the work with the comment that, as the members of the quintet were learning the piece, they were constantly amazed at how little of the original composition was missing. She only felt the lack of percussion. Eran Egozy, clarinet, remarked after the concert that he was impressed by the number of instruments he needed to emulate the percussion — successfully in my opinion. The result was amazing. The driving rhythms (helped by the outstanding performance of Gregory Newton on bassoon), the primal harmonies, and the sometimes brutal sound, were all there. Wonderful what the combination of muted horn and clarinet and/or bassoon can do! The sound was not as loud as I heard it in the Berlin Staatsoper, but the piece and the performance were grippingly gutsy and seemed, if anything, way too short.

Le Sacre du Printemps's debut was greeted with great controversy, but within a year the music was accepted as a modernist icon. Seven years later (1920-21) Ravel composed his Sonata for Violin and Cello. Ravel remarked "[the sonata] is music ... stripped to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and increasingly there is a return of emphasis on melody." To modern ears — and especially after just hearing a great performance of *Sacre*, the sonata is far from rejecting harmony. The harmonies chosen immediately say "Ravel" but with a modernist twist. The program notes describe it (accurately) as "a peculiar and specific beauty; so transparent in sections it glimmers like glass panes, driven by rhythm, texture, and a dose of exoticism." Pairing it with the *Le Sacre du Printemps* was a superb programming choice. The performance by Jae Young Cosmos Lee, violin, and Miriam Bolkosky, cello, was precise and engaging.

For the third piece on the program, Egozy performed Warsaw's *Lone Conversation* (1994) for solo clarinet. The piece is intended as a reflection of an internal conversation with oneself, full of questions, partial answers, doubts, and occasional triumph. Egozy introduced it by saying that the composer had included in the score very helpful verbal descriptions of the kind of sound she wanted. He gave two examples of the same line, marked "pleading" in the score, showing the difference between how he would play it as marked versus playing as "resolute." The result was emotionally entirely different. It is a great piece and was well played.

In the last piece, *Fantasia* (1945) by Bohuslav Martinu, Dalit Warsaw played theremin along with Jay Lee and Omar Chen Güey, violins, Noriko Futagami Herndon, viola, Miriam Bolkosky, cello, and Sarah Bob, piano. Besides a brilliant career as a composer and pianist, Dalit Warsaw studied the theremin from an early age with Clara Rockmore, a renowned practitioner. The piece is a mixture of the classicism of Stravinsky and the Czech melodies and harmonies of Janacek and Bartok. Over it all, the sound of the theremin floats like an angelic voice. It was spectacular to watch Warsaw perform. The right hand controls the pitch of the note, and the left hand, the loudness. With the left hand on the U-shaped antenna, the theremin is silent; as the hand is raised the volume increases. Warsaw held her right hand with fingers bent in precise position in front of the pitch antenna, while her left hand in graceful gestures pumped the volume of each note. A crook of the middle finger of the right hand was sufficient to raise the pitch by a semitone — two fingers would do a whole tone. When an octave was required the whole forearm moved precisely forward and back — fascinating to watch, and a great feat of precision. And one can watch and listen to the all-time master Rockmore [here](#).

Jennifer Montbach's husband — an electronics expert — put together a theremin that we could all attempt to play at the reception after the concert. I gave it a try, and barely managed to squeak out "Yankee Doodle." It is *very* difficult to keep a good pitch, at least at a first try. Try pumping the left hand while leaving the right hand precisely still... but what a great addition to a great evening.