

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

Radius Shared Sonic Love

by David Patterson
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“Dragons” was the header for Radius’s first of four concerts for the current season. The second, “Kin,” came last night. Derek Bermal’s pleasure-to-hear *Twin Trio* delivered a clarified sound-matching which illuminated Longy’s Pickman Hall. In a Radius Ensemble world premiere commission, *Tracing Lines* by Jonathan Bailey Holland created “a remix-of-sorts” drawing upon a “mix of musical influences.” Arnold Bax and Ravel *joined* this extended family, with Radius personalizing both: if Bax were your loving aunt, Ravel might have been somewhat of a distant cousin.

The straightforwardness of Bermal’s *Twin Trio* (2005) coupled just right with the natural flair of flutist Ann Bobo, clarinetist Eran Egozy, and pianist Sarah Bob. Bobo and Egozy tuned Bermal’s excellent note formations in “mirror” to the tee causing one to wonder who was playing what. In the second movement, “converse,” pianist Bob beautifully related to Bermal’s rich and lovely harmonic backdrop upon which intermittent birdcalls brilliantly sang out on their flute and clarinet. Only the two wind instruments, the twins, slid their way through “share,” where glissandos and bending tones took over. Sound nasty? Not at all. Bobo and Egozy refined every last detail that appeared in their two-way tightness. Then came “follow” in a robust performance. Clearly, Radius players were at the top of their game; it was pure and simple (not always) sonic love.

Pretty much the same could be said of Radius’s taking on the Quintet for oboe and strings (1922) by the conservative Arnold Bax. Family? Hmm. From the program notes: “Famously, Bax—an Englishman—remarked upon reading “The Wanderings of Usheen” ‘...and in a moment the Celt within me stood revealed.’” Maybe this is the connection? Whatever it might be, hearing Radius and hearing this rarely heard piece caused time to pass quite pleasantly.

Artistic Director Jennifer Montbach’s full-throated oboe always spoke directly in a voice of its own as the changing moods of the three-movement piece ran their courses. The string quartet included Jae Young Cosmos Lee and Omar Chen Güey, violins, with Ashleigh Gordon on viola, and Miriam Bolkosky on cello, all of whom brought welcoming warmth to the concert hall. That is, until the lively last movement when different opinions of timbres, balances and, more so, musical shapes of the Irish-bent Allegro giocoso were expressed.

Holland’s *Tracing Lines* for wind quintet and drums found a sonorous home with Radius and, as is Radius’s way, a place where you find just about anything that is worth a listen. This piece certainly was. Bobo, alto flute, Montbach, English horn, Egozy, bass clarinet, Gregory Newton, bassoon, Anne Howarth, horn, and Aaron Trant, drum kit offered yet another kind of sound, that emanating from the music of Robert Glasper, in particular his album “Black Radio.” Radius finely tuned in again, this time to a brotherhood of jazz voicings and attractive homophonies. Later, in Holland’s eight minute piece the composer took an excursion into quartal harmonies such as was the language of McCoy Tyner. The drum kit part felt held back as did the Radius players’ singing—yes, they did a bit of pop oohing-ahing.

The musicians gave brief introductions to the pieces on the program, promoting closeness rather than the more usual distance between performer and listener. Sarah Bob found family ties with Maurice Ravel’s father and mother as expressed in the French composer’s Piano Trio in A Minor. She related her personal experience with this masterpiece of chamber music as being one of a “conversation with your soul.” The technical demands of the trio were in large part satisfied—the harmonics ending the first movement being the most noticeable problem. There could not have been more involvement of Bob, Lee, and Bolkosky. What may have occurred is that attention given interpretation lessened the shaping of the whole. Direction and momentum needed to be more up front. This “painting” of the Ravel’s trio appeared distant, modernized as it was.

Their next concerts are “Legacy” scheduled for March and “Alchemy” in May.