

# The Boston Musical Intelligencer

## Radius radiates new and old

by David Patterson  
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Obvious to regulars at Radius, others may wish to learn that this Boston ensemble, now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year, is winner of a 2013 CMA/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming. Rightly so, last evening's offerings, along with one of a slim number of woodwind pieces from Beethoven, were a too-little-heard Françaix, perhaps the most well-known chamber work of Ravel, and an introduction, I suppose to many, to Boston composer Keeril Makan.

Color galore began with Quartet for English horn and strings by a rebel of atonal music, Jean Françaix. The work dating from 1971 still holds its tonally amplified ground as that which was put on display by Gabriela Diaz, violin, Noriko Futagami Herndon, viola, and Miriam Bolkosky, cello. The fourth instrument, the English horn—something equivalent in sound to the viola, as Jennifer Montbach put it—added a still deeper sumptuousness, a French enchantment.

And through Radius, this enchantment played out in deliciously tuned harmony, the stacked thirds going beyond those of Ravel and Debussy, providing layer upon lush layer. These often dense concords reminiscent of an advanced palette of jazz could easily speed by, one after the other, and Radius caught up to and on to this 20<sup>th</sup> century musing. Radius also eagerly understood the French salon shadowing of Françaix, where phrasing lilted and danced through the piece's five movements of sonic refreshment.

Featured guest artist Ina Zdorovetchi showered luster upon Maurice Ravel's Introduction and Allegro from the opening sweeping harp arpeggio of the *Trés lent* through to the upward flash of the six-fingered *glissando* closing of the *Allegro*.

"Pluck?" That would be Radius' label last night for this, the second in a series of four concerts at Pickman Hall, Longy School of Music of Bard College. Those who attended the first concert back in October, "Exhale," may recall Artistic Director Montbach coming onstage asking us all to take a deep breath with her.

Sarah Brady, flute, Evan Egozy, clarinet, and the quartet of strings, including guest artist Omar Chen Güey, violin, effervesced up to a point. An uneven start did not help. But more it was that the refinement we have come to know in this spectacular writing for the modern harp fitted into so neat a set of instruments, missed by a hair. Radius shaped the whole with ebullient climactic exclamation points while its suave ways were also just coming into sight. Zodorovetchi's single pluck to complete her glissandos seemed odd. Sarah Brady, who, in her short commentary, was candid about her unlimited love for this Ravel let that abundantly shine.

Keeril Makan writes about his *Nothing is More Important* (commissioned by Harvard Musical Association) as appearing two dimensional as in the paintings of Vittore Carpaccio, in particular his "Presentation of Jesus in the Temple" where instruments are depicted. "I tried to compose the music that I imagined that they would be playing on the analogous modern instruments of flute, harp, and viola." This being my first time hearing the piece, I would venture to say the performance by Brody, Zdorovetchi, and Herndon gave the piece every chance to live; theirs was certainly a polished and dedicated resounding. Though but some dozen or so minutes in length, this cleanly crafted nod to earlier times and music-making literally droned on, music perhaps more suited for meditation. (And why no program notes on the composer himself?)

Further eschewing angst, even brooding, Radius took on Ludwig van Beethoven's Quintet in E-flat for piano and winds, Op. 16. Even the *Grave* was somehow upbeat though that might seem to be a contradiction in terms. There is a good deal of piano writing in this early work, and with Sarah Bob at the keyboard, we would feel that we were left in competent hands. She delivered delicacy in the *Andante cantabile*, as elsewhere. Woodwinds welcomed new member Adrian Morejon whose clear-throated bassoon waxed eloquent along with Bob's fine pianism. A cozy, homey *Allegro* and *Rondo* comforted and charmed. Anne Howarth's wholehearted horn evoked friendliness. Montbach and Egozy naturalistic imitations continued Beethoven's light, optimistic mood swings outlining his youthful, highly satisfying classical architecture and coloration.

Another plus about Radius is its pacing. Brief comments warmly, often humorously preceding each piece from the various members suggest a fireside kind of evening, more and more a welcome tilt away from tendencies in the other direction—the staid, serious demeanor of classical music concerts. You should mark your calendars if this is what you have been looking for: March 7 “Echoes” and May 2 “Insight” both at Longy in Cambridge.