

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

Sensual Woodwinds, Fresh Presentations from Radius

by Stefanie Lubkowski
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The Radius Ensemble concert at Longy School of Music's Pickman Hall on Saturday, November 12 once again provided a multi-layered music experience that showcased new works, sensual woodwind timbres, and fresh presentations of familiar styles.

The concert began with Jan Bach's *Music for a Low Budget Epic* for the unusual combination of piccolo and bassoon. This four-movement suite began with a stirring overture in which the bassoon and piccolo traded melodies and trills, finally coming together in a perfect blend of registral extremes. This kind of *tête-a-tête* between the two instruments continued throughout the next three movements. The second movement was equally effective with its combination of a jaunty bassoon line with a more introspective piccolo melody. Alas, the third movement, described as a romantic balcony scene, was disappointing, despite the intriguing use of offstage piccolo playing birdlike fragments in response to the earnest and heroic bassoon. Somehow, I wanted to see some sort of resolution of the spatial and thematic space between the instruments, but they ended the movement just about where they began it. The finale managed to satisfy, with music full of pomp and a certain amount of frenzy. Jan Bach's music may not be particularly cutting-edge, but it does deliver an effective timbral and thematic interplay between rarely seen combinations of instruments. Flutist Sarah Brady and bassoonist Gregory Newton worked so well together the listener couldn't help feeling that there should be more piccolo and bassoon duos in the world.

It was a particular joy to hear the Mozart *Piano Trio No. 4 in E*, K. 542, in the context of newer works, rather than on the tired and monochromatic platform of an all-Mozart or all classical masters programs to which audiences are accustomed. In this setting, all the refinement, delicacy, and sense of play in Mozart's music comes to the forefront, and the listener is given the chance to experience more of the subtleties and surprises this music offers. In this rendition, the performers achieved just the right amount of feeling to bring out all the variety among the three movements without resorting to anachronistic romanticism.

The second half of the concert opened with Jean Françaix's *Divertissement* for oboe, clarinet and bassoon, a piece which demonstrates all the sensuality of winds. The prelude gave us a lyrical yet slightly ironic theme rendered in seamless and distinct timbres unique to wind ensembles. The second movement revealed a completely different character with its humorous, chromatic, swooping gestures reminiscent of circus music, jazz, and gypsy tunes. This contrast between lyrical and lighthearted continued in the third and fourth movements. Throughout the piece the ensemble played with a luxurious joy.

Katherine Hoover's trio for flute, horn, and piano proved to be one of the highlights of the evening. *Summer Night* is redolent with dark mysterious harmonies that move from more open configurations highlighting fifths to tightly chromatic sonorities, hitting on some impressionistic chords along the way. These evocative harmonies support moody melodies in the flute and horn. Pianist Sarah Bob's rendering was full of subtle expression and color. Sarah Brady and Anne Howarth coordinated their lines in a perfect partnership that became even more compelling during the more active, tense second theme. As the piece resolved into a mysteriously modal final theme, I was strongly reminded of summertime dusk, often referred to as "magic hour."

Radius Ensemble concluded their concert with Michael Gandolfi's multimedia piece, *Resonant Frames*, featuring abstract film by Pamela Larson. While each element of this work was wonderfully realized, *Resonant Frames* is truly a multimedia piece: only with the combination of sound and visuals does the work shine and bring full delight. Gandolfi's bright timbres, combined with undulating rhythms in a process of constant subtle change, perfectly complement and amplify the warm and fuzzy super eight images of light and shadow, sparkling water, waving trees, and rippling shadows.