

The Boston Globe

'Parfait' is a many-layered treat

By Jeffrey Gantz

Globe Correspondent / November 14, 2011

CAMBRIDGE - "Parfait" is a kind of layered dessert. It's also the French word for "perfect." It would be hard to call any concert of music perfect, but the one - titled "Parfait" - that Radius Ensemble presented at Longy School of Music on Saturday was layered and both savory and sweet, a toothsome end to any evening.

The concert also had a cinematic theme (dessert and a movie?), beginning with Jan Bach's "Music for a Low-Budget Epic" (2001) and ending with Michael Gandolfi's "Resonance Frames" (2003), a musical response to six short films by Boston filmmaker Pamela Larson - which were shown as the music was performed.

The centerpiece, though, was the only pre-20th-century work, Mozart's late (1788) Piano Trio No. 4. In the first movement, Jae Young Cosmos Lee (violin), Miriam Bolkosky (cello), and Sarah Bob (piano) appeared to be discoursing on the nature of love, as if they had just come from a performance of "Così fan tutte." A cynicism-dispelling nursery-rhyme theme permeated the slow movement, and that enabled optimism and sly humor to reign in the ebullient finale.

There had to be something French on the program, and it was Jean Françaix's "Divertissement" (1947), a nocturnal-sounding romp for oboe (Jennifer Montbach), clarinet (Eran Egozy), and bassoon (Gregory Newton). In its four movements, our hero seems to saunter along a Paris boulevard, run after a friend (or someone who owes him money), wait for a girl who never shows up, and finally jump on the carousel in the Tuileries.

That was followed by a second nocturne, Katherine Hoover's "Summer Night" (1985), for flute (Sarah Brady), horn (Anne Howarth), and piano (Bob). Howarth gave it a spooky start - her instrument sounded almost like the tenor horn that begins Mahler's Seventh Symphony. Brady's flute might have been a foraging mouse, Howarth's horn an owl looking for its dinner. Bob's piano underlined the drama with unsettling chords. There was a summer storm, and then the moon came out.

The film bookends were a little less rewarding. The four movements of Bach's duo had funny titles such as "Muzak at an Intergalactic Cantina," but only the "Nocturnal Love Scene on a Balcony" really delivered, Gregory Newton's bassoon swooning high and low like Juliet and Romeo while Brady's offstage piccolo twittered like a nightingale. And the Gandolfi-Larson collaboration was a surfeit of good things, too much to look at and listen to at once.

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MUSIC REVIEW

RADIUS ENSEMBLE
At: Pickman Concert Hall,
Longy School of Music,
Cambridge,
Saturday

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