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## Spectral sounds from Radius Ensemble

By Matthew Guerrieri

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CAMBRIDGE - Perhaps inevitably, the highlight of Saturday's Radius Ensemble concert at Longy was Bohuslav Martinu's 1945 "Fantasia" for theremin, oboe, and piano quintet, because, really, a theremin is going to be the highlight of any concert it's in. Both Kathryn Bacasmot's program notes and a spoken introduction by oboist Jennifer Montbach, Radius's artistic director, reassured that the instrument wasn't just a gimmick, but it is, at least partially, and a good one at that: the friendly ghost of electronic music, the performer pulling its spectral purring out of thin air.

Martinu frames the instrument's appearances with dramatically stony music from the piano (Sarah Bob) and strings (Jae Young Cosmos Lee and Omar Chen Güey on violins, violist Noriko Herndon, and cellist Miriam Bolkosky), steely sounds repeatedly dropping away to reveal the theremin hovering in the background like a soft shadow. Dalit Warshaw was the soloist, exemplifying the purposefully transfixed choreography the theremin demands, such a compelling part of seeing the instrument in performance.

For a good part of the piece, one could sense her adjusting to the space and the feedback from the other instruments, but the intonation settled in as Martinu's ideas circled back around; a duet with Herndon was particularly beautiful, and, in some of the final, full-ensemble passages, the instrument's deep whistle lent an almost choral resplendence. (Warshaw is also a composer; her 1994 solo "Lone Conversation," given a snazzy performance by clarinetist Eran Egozy, laced a rhythmically free new-music monologue with allusions to the clarinet's more folk-like guises.)

The concert's first half filled its own cabinet of curiosities. Montbach and Egozy, joined by flutist Sarah Brady, bassonist Gregory Newton, and hornist Anne Howarth, opened the evening with Jonathan Russell's wind quintet abridgement/arrangement of Igor Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," an epoch-making locomotive distilled into a zippy, tuneful toy train.

Lee and Bolkosky then joined for Maurice Ravel's "Sonata," the composer's customary polished veneer abraded to a wiry, sharp core. It was a skillful reading that didn't always coalesce into a full performance - movements took time to come into rhythmic focus - but when it did, the pair encapsulated Ravel's bleak energy; the end of the slow third movement was especially precise, an overcast view in sharp focus. Miniaturizing the "Rite" showed how Stravinsky's orchestral ferocity cloaked terrific melodic allure; Ravel's austerity revealed that, behind his orchestral allure, there was always a fierce core. ■

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