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The young upstarts

Presentation counts for the Radius Ensemble

by Stephen Marc Beaudoin

The Radius Ensemble in concert, in Pickman Hall, Longy School of Music, Cambridge, May 18.

It should be no secret by now that the Radius Ensemble is one of Boston's best upstart chamber music groups. The players are all accomplished free-lance musicians, and under the intelligent leadership of Director Jennifer Montbach, their programs—from repertoire to reception—are inevitably well planned and executed. Their season-ending annual "encore concert," performed May 18 at Longy's Pickman Hall, was no exception.

True to its mission of "forging a connection between musicians and music lovers," this hip group lets the audience choose which pieces from the season's offerings deserved an encore, and then lets select audience members introduce those pieces. It made for a lively and engaging night of chamber music.

George Crumb's "Eleven Echoes of Autumn" opened the concert dramatically, with music that appealed to both eye and ear. Violinist Biliana Voutchkova played (barefoot) while bathed in a pale green light, and winds Orlando Cela and Eran Egozy moved about the stage, occasionally ending up with backs to the audience, instruments pointed into the piano. One certainly can't accuse Crumb of not being inventive: in addition to the tasks above, the performers were required to variously

whistle, whisper in Spanish or a host of other tricks. Sarah Bob, half in shadow, all but crawled inside her piano. Each performer acquitted him/herself with commitment and honor.

Faure's Piano Quartet no. 1, op. 15 is a staple of the chamber music repertoire—a piece that, although penned by a composer of the French school, is decidedly Germanic in both form and feeling. Liana Zaretsky, Annette Klein, Michael Bonner and Anne Kissel Harper opened up as the piece progressed, and the final movement absolutely soared with beautiful lyric playing by all, Bonner perhaps proving first among near equals.

Nielsen's Woodwind Quintet, op. 43 is a lively truffle from this Danish composer's oeuvre, and one that calls for rhythmic vitality and ensemble clarity: this Radius wind quintet delivered on both counts. Orlando Cela contributed a lovely, clear warm tone on the flute, and Tracy McGinnis' bassoon was appropriately boisterous.

For their final piece, Astor Piazzolla's "Primavera portena" (Spring) from "Four Seasons in Buenos Aires," the players, now seated at the rear of the stage, made way for an attractive pair of tango dancers. Voutchkova, Bonner and Harper sumptuously supplied the steamy soundtrack.

The next logical step for this group: a new works commissioning project or competition, or perhaps a composer residency. An ensemble with this much talent and programmatic smarts is the perfect vehicle to introduce new voices in the next generation of classical music composition. ▼