

## Walden Chamber Players Give Pleasurable Concert

March 16, 2007

Sunday's Newtown Friends of Music concert presented the Walden Chamber Players in a very satisfying concert of chamber music for instrumental combinations just a bit off the beaten track.

The classical repertoire does not offer a great many examples of the piano quartet (piano, violin, viola and cello) but the young Walden group offered two of the finest, by Mozart and Schumann, to open and close their concert. Mozart's E flat quartet always seems in a hurry to start, as if we were catching the composer in mid-sentence. The Waldens' elegant, tight ensemble made an immediate impression.

Violinist Irina Muresanu stood out with the rhythmic ease and freedom of her playing. Dynamic contrasts in the group's playing brought out the full range of Mozart's dramatic writing. Pianist Jonathan Bass showed sensitivity in his phrasing as well, although some passages of the virtuosic piano part did not come off cleanly.

There is a moment for strings alone in the slow movement where all grows very still, a highlight for this listener, and the Walden players conveyed it beautifully. The lively finale was taken at a rather deliberate tempo, emphasizing varied accents and dynamic shadings, but captured all of the music's playfulness and joy.

The violist's inner part can sometimes get lost in the brilliance of such a work, but Artistic Director Christof Huebner got his chance to shine in Francois Devienne's Duo for Flute and Viola, Opus 5, with flautist Marianne Gedigian. Devienne was a French contemporary of Mozart, a flautist and bassoonist whose vast output of compositions includes some 85 duos for flute.

The work's brilliantly idiomatic writing showed off Gedigian's nimble articulation and rich tone. Huebner's rhythmic, incisive viola playing was a good match. The composer certainly knew how to blend the two instruments and the players understood it as well. There is a theme and variations movement whose theme is marked "grazioso," and Gedigian shaped its phrases graciously indeed. Huebner's dramatic, rhythmically supple playing in the first variation served the music well. The quiet repetition of the original theme, after all the virtuosic display of the variations, is a nice touch, and one that the players handled with aplomb.

After intermission Gedigian joined the three string players for Mozart's Flute Quartet in A major, K. 298. The work is an example of music written for friends, to be played at home for the family's amusement, as Mozart's long, humorous tempo marking for the finale (not too fast, not too slow, etc.) tells us. The match in phrasing and overall sensibility between flute and strings was fine. The flautist's breath control and feeling for line, along with her tone and articulation really sold the music. The minuet was graceful and the finale moved ahead with a sense of urgency without rushing.

The concert closed with the same forces and in the same key with which it had started, with Robert Schumann's Piano Quartet Opus 47. The ensemble playing continued to sparkle, with an added feeling of passion suitable to Schumann's Romantic era. The slow movement showed off cellist Ashima Scripp's rich tone. Her playing, and the violinist's and violist's when they had their turn at the theme, was expressive without being schmaltzy, which must be a danger playing this soaring tune.

The finale was both delicate and robust. All four players offered exciting playing within a tight ensemble, echoing Schumann's forebears Bach and Beethoven in the imitative lines and achieving a genuinely Romantic effect with their combined efforts. A happy conclusion to pleasurable afternoon of music.

– *Gilbert H. Moss, Special to the News-Times*