

Revisiting Vienna with the Walden Chamber Players

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Some things are said to improve with age, and I'd like to include classical music in this enviable category. Time gives both the performer and listener an opportunity to become better acquainted with compositions than when they premiered, for everyone's benefit.

Such was the case last Sunday when Newtown Friends of Music presented the Walden Chamber Players at Edmond Town Hall, performing works written about 200 years ago by Franz Schubert and Ludwig van Beethoven. I dare say that we've come a long way from the Vienna of two centuries ago, but much remains timeless.

The Walden Chamber Players opened with Schubert's Adagio and Rondo Concertante, D. 487, written in 1816. The musicians imparted brightness from the opening measures of the introductory adagio. Pianist Jonathan Bass quickly assumed the lead as they flew into the rondo -- *allegro vivace*. Bass carefully maintained an even balance between the piano and the trio, consisting of violinist Curt Macomber, violist Christof Huebner and cellist Ashima Scripp.

Listening was a joy, as the group was successfully recreating the atmosphere of a recital in old Vienna, demonstrating polish gained from years of experience.

The trio continued with Beethoven's Serenade in D for violin, viola and cello, Op. 8, published in 1797. Shades of Mozart and Haydn's tutelage were in evidence, but 25-year-old Beethoven was already beginning to push musical boundaries. The piece consisted of a mixture of marches and minuets, in seven short contrasting movements. The adagio in the second part had delightful harmonies between violin and viola, and the cello ended the third movement with a little strumming. Unexpected tempo shifts made for some humor in the fifth section. The trio energetically restated the opening theme in the final movement.

Following intermission, bassist Don Palma joined the other four members, expanding their depth for the ebullient Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 114 "The Trout," one of Schubert's most popular works. High-spirited energy propelled the piano, smoothly flowing with the strings. The players performed the lyrical *andante* with a delicate sense of internal cohesion rarely heard. In the *andantino*, they played the theme and five variations of "Die Forelle" (The Trout) swimmingly well and ended the *allegro gusto* with gypsy abandon.

The Walden Chamber Players presented works of the two Viennese masters with respectful attentiveness, helping us continue to appreciate them in the present, while giving a glimpse into a wonderful chapter of musical history.