

ENTERTAINMENT

SHULER THEATER

Chamber music concert lets young talents shine

By Tim Keller
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RATON – During its current 37th season, Music from Angel Fire is presenting almost 50 events in just under three weeks, mostly concerts presenting three or four musical compositions by a similar number of composers. While it all falls under the heading of chamber music, the programming amounts to a veritable variety show. Tuesday night's annual free concert at the Shuler Theater had something for everyone.

With four compositions performed by four groups, the music ranged from sublime and melodic to discordant and dissonant. The latter was represented in the opening piece only, a world-premiere performance of "Parallels for String Quartet" by Philadelphia composer Alyssa Weinberg, the festival's 2015 Young Artist Composer-in-Residence who was present to introduce her work and then enjoy the audience's warm applause when the Dola String Quartet completed its nine-minute performance.



Weinberg's introduction helped immensely in appreciating her intentions and music. Inspired by the bustle and chaos of Philadelphia painter William Glackens's New York City street scenes, Weinberg said she wanted to express musically such clamor and crowding, hoping to lead her listeners "traveling along a journey through the different tapestries that I've created."

A listener might imagine a visitor unfamiliar with the city traveling its streets and subways through a pastiche of impressions and sounds. The music evoked isolation and crowding simultaneously, a lone traveler navigating amid the jarring sounds of

Quartet No. 3 in D Major" was deeply emotional, the audience's appreciation again aided by introductory remarks, this time from MFAF Executive Director Elizabeth Harcombe.

Korngold was in Los Angeles completing the film score to the Errol Flynn classic "The Adventures of Robin Hood," for which he won the Academy Award, when Hitler's advances made Korngold's return home impossible; he remained in the United States until his death twenty years later.

Although not created for a movie, it was easy to imagine a 1930s film as one listened to Korngold's "String Quartet No. 3 in D Major." Composed in four movements that the young Wissahokon musicians played in 27 minutes, the music alternated lush, tender passages—it was easy to imagine the music leading to the inevitable kiss between the male and female leads near the end of a film—with pulsating movements that would propel a film through its moving plotline.

Whether playing transcendent three-part harmonies or plucking violin and viola notes to emulate a plucked harp, the Wissahokon Quartet delighted, this reviewer's favorite performance of the night.

Others disagreed, voting for either of the two performances that followed a 20-minute intermission. Those pieces lacked the benefit of specific introductory remarks to help guide a listener's imagination, but for many that was preferable, leaving the music and performance to weave a spell unaided.

The Qwinda Wind Quintet provided new tones and textures as the earlier strings yielded to flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn for another lush musical composition, "Summer Music for Wind Quintet" by 20th Century American composer Samuel Barber, another Pennsylvanian. As Qwinda finished, the five musicians' faces relaxed and burst into smiles of joy and accomplishment, a feeling strengthened by enthusiastic audience response.



Music from Angel Fire's "Stars of Tomorrow" concert closed with selected songs for clarinet and strings by George Gershwin, performed by an all-star quintet that combined older masters with rising young stars of chamber music. From left are Ida Kavafian, Theodore Arm, Stanislav Chernyshev, Will Chow and Bryony Gibson-Cornish.

a strange and bustling city. Taking her inspiration from a painter and his paintings, Weinberg's music combined with imagination to become highly visual, although without the benefit of her introduction the listener might have struggled to find such meanings. In the lobby afterward, one listener said "it was cacophony—not music, just sound."

The night's second performance had no such problem. The Wissahikon Quartet's performance of Erich Korngold's "String

This year's MFAF theme is "Made in America" so the Raton concert closed with a selection of George Gershwin songs arranged for string quartet and clarinet. Since 1984, the festival has brought America's brightest young talent—fewer than 4% of those who audition are accepted—for three-week residencies that allow young prodigies to rub elbows with their elder masters. (The young musicians also spend many days visiting band students in area schools, reaching nearly 3500 students this summer.)



Photos by Tim Keller / The Chronicle-News

Clockwise from above, the Wissahikon String Quartet performs Erich Korngold's "String Quartet No. 3 in D Major" at Raton's Shuler Theater Tuesday night, one of four groups performing for Music from Angel Fire. Music from Angel Fire's 2015 Young Artist Composer-in-Residence Alyssa Weinberg, left, enjoys applause after Tuesday night's world premiere of her "Parallels for String Quartet."

For the Gershwin finale, master violinists Theodore Arm and MFAF Artistic Director Ida Kavafian were joined in performance by young protégés Bryony Gibson-Cornish on viola, Will Chow on cello and Stanislav Chernyshev on clarinet. The music moved quickly and playfully through several varied pieces over 15 minutes, ending with a short but spirited rendering of "I've Got Rhythm."

All of that was presented for free. While most MFAF concerts costs \$35, three concerts each year are presented free of charge thanks to underwriting from generous sponsors that, in Raton, include the Whitened and Darden foundations, International Bank and the City of Raton Lodgers' Tax Board. In its 28th year, the Raton concert at the Shuler was a much-appreciated gift to the community.



From left, Wissahikon includes Shannon Lee, Brandon Garbot, Arlen Hlusko and Rimbo Wong. The five members of Qwinda—Niles Watson, William Weiler, Amit Melzer, Catherine Chen and Stanislav Chernyshev, from left—enjoy their moment after completing a passage of Samuel Barber's "Summer Music for Wind Quintet."

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