



The Cobbett Association for Chamber Music Research

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The Philadelphia Trio Wins Critics' Praise

The three lovely ladies pictured below have established an enviable reputation as the Philadelphia Trio. Wherever they appear, they are highly praised for their consistently lyrical and sensitive performances.

The trio, which is a member of the Cobbett Association, was formed in 1971. It has presented concerts and workshops throughout the United States and Europe, including frequent appearances for the BBC in London and broadcasts on Spanish National Radio and Television. They have also initiated several chamber music series in the Philadelphia area and made frequent appearances on radio and television.

In addition to the standard classical and romantic trio literature, the trio's repertoire includes 20th century works by European and American composers. They also present programs of women composers as well as works with other instruments and voice.

For a number of years the trio was "in-residence" at Rosemont College and the Yellow Springs Institute (suburban Philadelphia). They have recorded for Centaur Records, and composers Lawrence Azelrod, Robert Capanna, and Imants Merzarup have all written trios for them.

Violinist Barbara Sonies and cellist Deborah Reeder are co-directors of "Music in the Mountains", a two-week chamber music program for string players and pianists, ages 13-20, held annually in August in Eagles Mere, Pa. They are also regular substitutes with the Philadelphia Orchestra (Ms. Reeder a former member) with whom they toured Europe and Israel in 1991 and 1992.

Each of the trio members has an impressive background which includes education in prestigious music schools, faculty positions in various colleges,

and performing positions in well known orchestras and ensembles.

Like women everywhere, the trio members are all fond of cooking and trying new restaurants, but they are also strong supporters of environmental and humane causes. Mrs. Sonies is an avid birder and Ms. Reeder enjoys photography. Ms. Keller, and her husband John Zurfluh, who is principal cellist of the Harrisburg (PA) Symphony, spend as much time as possible on their boat in the Chesapeake Bay and the Thousand Island area of the St. Lawrence River.

On the following page are a few comments about the trio from music critics here and abroad:



L to R: Deborah Reeder, cello; Elizabeth Keller, piano; Barbara Sonies, violin.

The Philadelphia Trio (Con. from Page 1)

"...The performance was splendid... glorious sounds individually, and powerful statements as an ensemble....its special attention to detail and nuance quickly becomes an expected norm. -- Wash. Post

"...phrasing had the kind of unanimity that implied minute care, but was never mechanical." -- London Daily Telegraph

"Subtlety is the byword of the Philadelphia Trio...distinctive and new interpretations." -- Philadelphia Inquirer

"...performance of the highest calibre... exuberant performance." -- Glasgow Herald

"... a lyrical presentation notable for its technical easescintillating performance presented with impressive musical insight from the entire group, and amazing virtuosity from each individual player." -- Greensboro, NC News & Record

Cobbett Assn. Member Writes Important Book on Chamber Music

Congratulations to Cobbett Association Member and cellist, James Christensen, M.D., on the publication of his new book, Chamber Music: Notes for Players.

Dr. Christensen uses notes accumulated over a lifetime of playing chamber music, as both professional and amateur, to create a book which will interest all levels of performers. After selecting works from the mainstream of the genre, he provides specific types of information about each.

Each entry is briefly described and comments are offered concerning their historical context. Also included are the author's comments about the suitability of the piece for amateur study. The works are arranged in three sections: string quartets, works for more than four string players, and multiple strings with piano.

The book has been recommended by Judith Glyde, former cellist of the Manhattan String Quartet, who writes, "A remarkable collection of works, the descriptions of which are valuable for chamber music players of all ages and strengths -- and for their coaches." Rachmael Weinstock, the distinguished violinist and teacher says, "Dr. Christensen's fine book will contribute enormously to the pleasure and understanding of chamber music players, whether amateur

or professional. Indeed, I believe that every lover of chamber music will find indispensable his discussions of these gems of the repertoire."

The book can be ordered from **Distinctive Publishing Corp.**, P.O. Box 17868, Plantation, FL 33318-7868. Price, \$19.95, postpaid. Florida residents, add \$1.02 sales tax. Telephone orders: 1-800-683-3722.

New Cellist for MSQ

Cellist Chris Finckel recently joined the Manhattan String Quartet, replacing Judith Glyde who left to teach at the University of Colorado in Boulder. During the 1992-93 season, the quartet will play the 15 Shostakovich string quartets they previously recorded on C.D.'s. Time magazine named these C.D.'s among the top 1991 classical recordings. The Manhattan Quartet is a member of the Cobbett Assn.

Used Chamber Music Wanted

A number of our members have inquired as to where they can purchase used out-of-print chamber music. If you have such music you would like to sell, or if you know of a source, either an individual or a store, please send us the information with names and addresses. We will publish the information in a future newsletter.

Evaluation of Piano Trios

Enclosed with this newsletter is Part 2 of Trios for Piano, Violin, and Cello, with our evaluations and recommendations.

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Martinu's Chamber Music - An Exhilarating Experience



The noted Czech composer, Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959), has become very successful internationally because his music is filled with much ingenuity and originality.

His chamber music won't please all tastes because some will tire of his type of rhythmic drive. Performers sometimes complain of "too many notes" or lack of sentiment in some movements. In spite of this, he has a large following, especially in Europe. Much of his chamber music, however, is neglected by performing groups in the U.S.A.

After discovering French impressionism, Martinu moved to Paris in 1923, where he studied with Roussel. Paris became his second home.

Debussy was his ideal, as was Mozart, and he was also very impressed with Stravinsky's music.

From the influence of the impressionists and Czech folk material, he created an idiom of his own. His themes are not complete in the beginning, but take final form gradually as the whole phrase is developed. His melodic line is transparent and is based on absolute music. Martinu is very skilled in polyphonic treatment, harmony, and tone color, all of which are subordinate to the general flow of the composition. In some cases he incorporates jazz elements and neo-classical harmony in his music.

Martinu immigrated to America in 1941 after the Nazi's blacklisted him. He taught at Princeton University and at the Curtis Institute for several years. He was befriended by Koussevitzky who gave him

commissions and encouraged him. He left the U.S. in 1956 to teach in Rome and later moved to Switzerland where he died at 69.

Martinu was very versatile, composing symphonies, ballets, choral works, opera, concertos, radio music, and much chamber music. These total about 400 compositions, many of which have been widely played. Evaluated below are his most successful chamber music works.

Seven String Quartets and a Sextet

No. 1 "French" (1920) Debussy and Ravel influences are evident. The first allegro has variation type development. The next three -- andante moderato, allegro non troppo, and allegro con brio -- follow in a monothematic succession. The scherzo is dance-like with a trio section. Moderate Difficulty - Very Good Rating

No. 2 (1925) His first success after arriving in Paris. Performed often in Europe. It is rich in pungent harmony and double stops. Movements are moderato-allegro vivace, andante, allegro. The first is based on the sonata form. The third is a slow rondo with a clever introduction using a "Moravian" cadenza in the first violin part. Difficult - Excellent

No 3 (1929) Played less often than his other quartets, it has innovative sound, a transparent melodic line contrasted with complex harmonies and rhythms. In many places the vertical harmony line has sharp discords. Three movements, allegro, andante, and vivo, make it a short and concise work. The andante is mysterious and very expressive. The vivo has lots of fast runs for all four with an impressive climax. Difficult - Very Good

No 4 (1937) Known as his very lyrical quartet. The first mvmt, allegro poco moderato, is very vivacious with melodic and lyric interludes. The scherzando is spritely in nature, mixed with lyric surprises for contrast. The adagio is rather thoughtful and intellectual with much polyphony. The final allegro is typically rhythmic with lyric melodies woven in. Difficult - Very Good

No. 5 (1938) Wildly driving in nature, it was dedicated to the renowned Pro-Arte Quartet of Belgium. It remained unknown until the MS was discovered in 1955. The

first allegro has a short Czech melody treated in sonata form, using close harmony. In the adagio, there are special effects using a songlike melody. The third, an allegro vivo, is a grotesque scherzo, and the fourth, lento-allegro, has a long introduction which is tragic in nature. This is followed by a virile allegro with great chords and passionate expression. Difficult - V.G.

No 6 (1946) Described by critics as an "extremely polyphonic" quartet. (Music not available for evaluation at this time.)

No. 7 (1947) Created in America after his six years here. Sub-titled "Concerto de Camera". Neo-classical and transparent in nature. Uses the traditional 3 concerto mvmts but is still written in chamber music style. Poco allegro, andante, and allegro vivo. Has a beautiful and lyric andante with Czech nationalistic feeling expressed in the outer mvmts. More traditional harmony is used here than in his earlier quartets. Difficult - Excellent

Sextet for Strings (1932) An imaginative and concise work. It was awarded the E.S. Coolidge Prize in 1932, competing against 145 entries. Olin Downes, NY Times critic wrote, "It is a real sextet and not a quartet with two extra instruments." The American audience received it with great enthusiasm for its strength, vitality, and creative power. Its mvmts are lento allegro poco moderato, andantino, allegro scherzando, and allegretto poco moderato. The sextet features intriguing rhythms and pungent harmonies. The andantino is rather intellectual in nature. Difficult -- Excellent

Works for Piano and Strings

Piano Quartet No. 1 (1942) A mature work written shortly after his settlement in the U.S. The beginning poco allegro opens with a terse motive repeated frequently in different forms. Moravian folk song is used in a new melody before the recap. The adagio begins with a passionate trio for the strings and a cello cadenza. A mysterious and dreamy middle section is next with the piano playing fast roulades. Piano is silent at the end and allows the strings to complete the mvmt. The allegretto poco moderato begins with

the piano alone and the strings join with impressive harmony. An acceleration to allegro follows, with upward rushing scales passed among the players. At the main climax the first mvmt theme appears, which is followed by a brief andante before the allegretto returns at the end. Diff - V.G.

Piano Quintet No. 1 (1944) A complex work using Czech folk melodies. Meditative melodies predominate over the pointed rhythms characteristic of his 1st creative period. Mvmts are poco allegro, adagio, scherzo, largo-allegro vivace. The scherzo is very effective with syncopated and accented rhythms. The finale has a slow, thoughtful introduction without piano. A good rhythmic theme follows with pungent harmonies for strings. Difficult - V.G.

Piano Quintet No. 2 (1944) A neglected work, nevertheless it is considered one of his best works. Great skill is used in alternating fast and slow tempos, and combining motor rhythms with choral-like melodies. The faster parts are busy as usual but always tuneful. The adagio features trills, ostinato rhythms, and arpeggios. Both outer mvmts contain slow central sections, and the finale has a very inspired slow introduction. Difficult Excellent

Trio for Flute, Cello, and Piano (1944) This is a warm-hearted trio in 3 mvmts, poco allegretto, adagio, and andante-allegretto scherzando. One of Martinu's most ingratiating works. It can be described as light, cheerful, graceful, elegant, and always busy, with strong rhythms. Capabilities of the instruments are exploited, and the wit is subordinate to the solidity of the composition. The music has a polyphonic sound and reminds one of Roussel. Moderate - Excellent

Martinu is well known for his daring and unusual instrumental combinations. Two good examples are his Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra and his Concertino for Piano Trio and String Orchestra.

Also attracting much attention over the years are two remarkable duets, Madrigals for Violin and Viola, and Madrigal Stanzas for Violin and Piano.

Most of his chamber music has been recorded on the Czech label, Supraphon.