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The Tarble's Merling Trio: Encore! Encore!

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By Carl Lebovitz

The Tarble Arts Center opened its 2005-2006 Chamber Music Series on a high note this past Sunday with recital by the Merling Trio.

Founded in 1988, the ensemble consists of Susan Wiersma Uchimura, piano; Bruce Uchimura, cello; and Renata Artman Knific, violin. They made their Carnegie Hall debut in 1993, have given numerous recitals throughout the United States and Canada, and are currently in residence at the School of Music at Western Michigan University.

The recital opened with Beethoven's very first piano trio, the NO.1 in E-flat Major, Op.1, and No.1. Opus 1 is a set of three trios, written between 1793 and 1795.

With them young Beethoven made his bow as a regular composer. And a portentous bow it was. The No.1 has a youthful spring and is rich in melodic material and the strong expression of personal feeling. And from the vivacious opening allegro to the dynamic presto finale, the musicians gave it a brilliant performance.

The afternoon closed with one of the most famous of Dvorak's chamber pieces, Piano Trio in e minor, Op. 90 (1891), known as the "Dumky Trio," since it is made up of a series of elegiac movements. "Dumka" is a Slavic term meaning musical lament. This trio has six brief movements, each in a sad, and at times turbulent, mood, constructed in a slow-fast-slow pattern.

The ensemble did this impassioned and deeply expressive work full justice, beautifully capturing the "song and dance" elements of the score.

And there was the piece de resistance of the afternoon – "Milonga del Angel" and "Muerte del Angel," by Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992).

Piazzolla was an Argentine composer and bandoneon player who, after years of writing and playing in Buenos Aires bars, determined to break into "serious" music, taking composition lessons from Nadia Boulanger in Paris.

She directed him back to Argentina's true natural music- tango, which he transformed by incorporating rhythms and harmonic dissonances from jazz and orchestral music. His later "Nuevo tango" work was controversial, offending many tango populists by its sophisticated radicalism.

By the 1980's his work had finally become accepted in Argentina, and has begun to be espoused by classical artists, including Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax. And of course, the Merling Trio.

“Milonga del Angel” and: Muerte del Angel” were composed for a play, “Tango del Angel,” written in 1962 by Alberto Rodriguez, in which an angel heals the spirits of the residents of a poor Buenos Aires neighborhood, only to be killed in a knife fight.

They are fascinating, captivating pieces and the music was well served in the Merling’s magnificent performance.

It was an exhilarating concert, and the capacity audience gave it a warm reception. Only one thing missing- an encore.