

## **Flint (MI) Flint Journal**

### **Talented trio opens Bray Gallery concert series with style**

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**By Laurence E. MacDonald**

The new season of Bray Gallery concerts at the Flint Institute of arts began Sunday with a delightful program of chamber music presented by the Merling Trio. This very talented ensemble, founded in 1988 and now in residence at Western Michigan University, specializes in music written for violin, cello and piano. The program at the FIA consisted three works that effectively monstrated a wide range of performing capabilities.

The most technically challenging work of the afternoon was the Piano trio in D minor, Op 49, by Felix Mendelssohn. The composition's virtuosic skill as a pianist may have accounted for the fact at the piano part, expertly played by Susan Wiersma Uchimura, often overshadowed much of the other players.

Uchimura's playing was especially impressive in the rapid paced fast movement, which featured a dramatic opening theme based on a note motif, and a lyrical second. Fast triplet figures abound as the piano part all but dominated the fast paced coda.

In the slow second movement, pianist's husband, cellist Bruce Uchimura, blended with the piano a plaintive statement of a song theme. Later, the group's violinist, Renata Artman Knific, sweetly played this same melody. In the fast "Scherzo" movement, all three players excelled in maintaining the exuberant pace.

The dramatic finale provided the most dazzling moments of the afternoon, as all three players served up a musical smorgasbord of scales, arpeggios and runs, while keeping the dramatic presence of Mendelssohn's music in sharp focus. Indeed, this was a similarly impressive performance, despite the fact that the sheer volume of piano sound was perhaps commanding of the audience's attention. Had the lid of the Stein... not been fully raised, the reverberation in the small gallery might have contributed to a more balanced sound for those seated directly in front of the piano.

In the opening work of the program, Franz Joseph Haydn's Trio D Major (1785), the Merling Trio demonstrated a nice affinity of the classic style of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This short three-movement work lasted only eight minutes, but in that short time span the players showed the technical polish they would retain all afternoon.

The program's remaining work, the "Dumky" Trio of Antonin Dvorak, also provided the three performers with some challenging technical moments but also allowed them to show interpretive skills. This six-movement work, the title of which refers to a group of Czech folk songs of a mostly melancholy nature, began with a dramatic minor-key theme, followed by a contrasting energetic theme in a major key.

The alternating between melancholy and cheerful moments was a prominent feature of this truly distinctive work. As one of the members of the trio explained prior to the performance, the shifting of moods within a single movement is one of the trademarks of

the Dumky style. A standout moment was the dramatic conclusion of the second movement, which ended with a rapid series of thunderous chords of great intensity.

Another highlight was an extended cello solo in the march-style fourth movement. The ensemble command of dynamic contrast was especially helpful in conveying the contrasting moods. This contrast lasted to the very end, where sudden shifts between minor and major harmony were heard amid very dramatic outbursts.

It is regrettable that this Dvorak work is not better known in this country. It is hoped the spirited performance by the Merling Trio will help to change the concert-going public's opinion of the melodically integrating work.