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## **Chamber music group blends familiar pieces with obscure**

**By John Zeugner Telegram & Gazette reviewer**

### MUSIC REVIEW

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There was an air of anticipation bubbling in the capacity audience in the lower concert hall of St. Paul's Cathedral on Saturday night for the opening of the Worcester Chamber Music Society's second season - so much anticipation that it took a soaring high G from soprano Maria Ferrante to still the crowd.

It seems WCMS has gathered avid fans to match (in lesser decibels and numbers) the Tornadoes and Sharks. Ferrante and artistic director Peter Sulski explained that the program contained a familiar war horse, Bach's "Brandenburg Concerto No. 4," a rarely heard piano quintet by Edward Elgar and one almost-never-heard trio for harp, viola, and flute by Claude Debussy.

The crowd's buoyancy permeated the seven chamber members in the opening Bach Brandenburg. This was a marvelously energetic rendition of Bach's rhythms.

The duo flute work of Tracy Kraus and Amy Carroll was meticulous in its headlong execution, spiraling in and through the delicate lead violin efforts of Krista Reisner, and achieving absolute authority over the mesmerized audience.

As always, Ian Watson provided perfectly meshed support from the harpsichord, as did Michal Palzewicz on cello, and Amy Rawstron and Sulski, violinists. This was celebratory, romping Bach, a pure "wow" exposition.

So enthused was the crowd that the transition to the reflective, tragic explorations of the Debussy was very difficult to negotiate.

Debussy wrote the trio very late in his life, while listening to the German shelling of Paris, at a time he was struggling with fatal colon cancer and perhaps meditating on the marital messes he had incurred.

Debussy had clearly moved beyond his impressionistic romanticism to explore the tortured tonality of the most modern of compositions.

The musicians - Tracy Kraus, flute, Mark Berger, viola, and Ina Zdorovetchi, harp - were more than up to the challenge. Their playing was supple and riveting.

In particular, Berger handled the balance between sudden discordant tones and lush idyllic melodies with particular adroitness.

Those who might have dismissed Debussy as the creator of saccharine soundtracks like "Clair de Lune" and "La Mer" were forced to rethink everything about the Frenchman.

The final piece, the Elgar quintet, brought back Reisner and Sulski on violin, Berger on viola, Palzewicz on cello, and Watson, piano. Their playing was muscular, with emphasis on dynamics.

The composition has its Brahms-derivative moments, but in nuance and emotional power it is entirely worthy of its model. The second movement, adagio, was sculpted by the players with exquisite poignancy, wringing tears out of some of the audience.

The final movement displayed lush, hyperarticulated melodic lines building on each other.

The chamber music society equals incandescent music-making of the highest order and is an outstanding classical music bargain. Three more concerts are planned in Worcester: Nov. 16 at the First Unitarian Church, Jan. 19 at All Saints Church, and Feb. 15 at First Baptist Church.