

Quartet plus trio equals 7th heaven By Kyle

MacMillan, *Denver Post Fine Arts Critic*

A handful of masterpieces — including Mendelssohn's transcendent Octet — have been written for larger instrumental combinations than quartets or trios, but major examples of these augmented chamber works remain unusual.

That rarity helps explain the excitement, at least within the narrow confines of the chamber-music world, that has arisen around Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's new Septet for Piano Trio and String Quartet.

Denver, which too often sits on the sidelines for such events, **had the welcome opportunity Wednesday evening to host the eighth performance of this satisfying piece.** It debuted in April 2009 in New York City on the eve of Zwilich's 70th birthday.

Denver's Friends of Chamber Music deserves kudos for joining 11 other organizations nationwide to co-commission the work, an approach that spread the costs around and ensured a broad initial hearing.

Septet was written for the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio and the Miami String Quartet, two respected touring ensembles that teamed for an incisive, spirited interpretation at the University of Denver's Gates Concert Hall.

As logical as merging a string quartet (two violins, viola and cello) and a piano trio (piano, violin and cello) might seem, **this is apparently the first significant work ever written for the combination.**

Not as cutting edge as such composers as peers Osvaldo Golijov or Thomas Adès, Zwilich writes in a tonal, if at times dissonant, musical language that is direct and accessible without becoming cloying or compromising.

The heart of the piece is the slow, dark-hued second movement, Quasi una Passacaglia, which offsets spare, even forlorn, sections with more involved, ardent ones suffused with sharp, penetrating harmonies. It is followed by Games, a fun, jazzy movement with scampering melodies and syncopated rhythms.

FRANK SALOMON ASSOCIATES

121 West 27th Street, Suite 703, New York, NY 10001

tel: 212.581.5197; fax: 212.581.4029; e-mail: info@franksalomon.com www.franksalomon.com