



November 06, 2009

## Zwilich septet for strings and piano makes forceful impression

By Donald Rosenberg, The Plain Dealer



*photo credit Christian Steiner*

Violinist Jaime Laredo, left, pianist Joseph Kalichstein and cellist Sharon Robinson performed Thursday at Reinberger Chamber Hall in Severance Hall with the Miami String Quartet.

### **Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson and Miami String Quartet**

The moment anyone states that something or other is the first of its kind, an earlier incarnation usually turns up.

In the case of Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's Septet for Piano Trio and String Quartet, however, **it's possible there's no precedent.** Think about it: a **work for two sovereign chamber-music ensembles** – piano trio (piano, violin, cello) and string quartet (two violins, viola, cello). What could result when these distinctive groups attempt to find musical equality?

The local premiere of Zwilich's piece Thursday in Reinberger Chamber Hall at Severance Hall confirmed that **a galaxy of expressive interactions can happen when these instrumental complements become one big, impassioned debating team.** As played with robust and nuanced charisma by the **Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio and Miami String Quartet, the score emerged as a finely wrought, organic and rich tapestry of ideas.**

During the work's four movements, the ensembles exert independence only briefly, preferring to share material, enter into varied dialogues and find colors and textures that constantly grip the ear. The overall mood is dramatic and sad. Even in the offbeat episodes of the third movement, "Games," Zwilich tends toward the thrusting, rather than the playful.

The second movement contrasts the austerity of Baroque style with the emotional liberation of Romanticism. In the finale, Zwilich sums up the work's many themes with such skill that the seemingly novel instrumentation is revealed to be a sonic means to a deeply musical end.

The concert was part of the Thomas Schroth Visiting Artist Series based at Kent State University, where the Miami (violinists Benny Kim and Cathy Meng Robinson, violist Yu Jin, cellist Keith Robinson) is quartet in residence. **They appeared thrilled to be collaborating with their distinguished visitors – pianist Joseph Kalichstein, violinist Jaime Laredo and cellist Sharon Robinson, who've been a trio for more than three decades.**

Robinson joined the Miami in the program's opening work, Boccherini's Quintet in E major for Strings, G. 275, which abounds in novel effects and virtuoso flourishes. The cellists savored their banter in the first movement, the menuetto worked its serene magic and the finale's dashing sequences found the musicians in nimblest form.

In Schumann's Quintet for Piano and Strings in E-flat major, Op. 44, **the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio welcomed the Miami's Meng Robinson and Jin for a performance of feverish intensity.** They lavished the score's urgent and poetic lyricism with degrees of tonal warmth and emphatic phrasing that wouldn't have been out of place in a concert hall four times the size of intimate, aristocratic Reinberger.

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