



January 24, Raleigh, NC

Windscape: Knowledgeable, Musically Impeccable, and Breathtakingly Beautiful by Martha A. Fawbush

The unusually large and responsive audience in Fletcher Opera Theater no doubt expected a superb concert from the excellent wind quintet *Windscape*, brought to Raleigh as part of the Masters Series of the Raleigh Chamber Music Guild, **but it is safe to say that no one could have expected the height of performance which this gifted ensemble presented. Indeed, had there not been a thoroughly justified, spontaneous, and prolonged standing ovation, my appreciation of the brilliance I had heard would have caused me to stand** — alone, if no one else did.

The five outstanding members of *Windscape* — Tara Helen O'Connor, flute, Randall Ellis, oboe, Alan R. Kay, clarinet, Frank Morelli, bassoon, and David Jolley, horn — **all have impressive musical and educational credentials which are clearly evident in the brilliant music they play.** In addition to their obvious skills as players, they demonstrate to all who hear them perhaps their most impressive musical characteristic: the enviable ability to perform as one unit, to be a tightly-unified group in which each musician is totally connected to the musical thought, understanding, and musical expectations of his or her colleagues. Since ensemble playing is to me the most important quality any group of performers can possess, I took special delight in this concert, which seemed to be over all too soon.

Windscape labeled its concert a "Paprikash" of Middle European music composed by men of the nineteenth-and early-twentieth centuries and representing a variety of musical styles and forms. First on the program were some Early Hungarian Dances of Ferenc Farkas (1905-2000), whose treatment of this series of dances of the seventeenth century was originally composed for piano in 1943. The dances in this pastiche are distinctly individual pieces. The first, the Intrada, is bright, highly rhythmic, and musically exciting, and it gave the audience a clear indication of the bravura abilities of each player. The Lento is a lamenting piece in total contrast to the others; **it demonstrated the players' great skill in shifting the musical gears from frenetic motion to subdued, reflective, melancholy phrases.** The last three pieces are full of rapid movement and highly individual lines in each part which contribute to one's mental pictures of the movements required by the dancers.

The Six Bagatelles of Gyorgy Ligeti (1923-2006) are drawn from a piano work of eleven movements, six of which Ligeti chose in 1953 to orchestrate. However, the chromaticism so much a part of these arrangements met with the strong disapproval of the Hungarian government, which prevented the compositions from being played in Ligeti's native Hungary. Indeed they were not performed until more than a decade later, in Stockholm. The title of Ligeti's composition, "Six Bagatelles," suggests music having little more to recommend it than all the wit one can stuff into the brevity of the pieces, but in musical reality, all of them are profound statements of contentment, grief, and other emotions. **These**

six movements served as a fine display of the great technical skill of Windscape's players, who demonstrated dizzying rapid staccato playing as well as intensely beautiful, slowly articulated melodies punctuated by frequent, startling dissonances.

The third work on Windscape's program was the Quintet in E-flat, Op. 88, by Anton Reicha (1770-1836), the oldest of the composers whose music was included in this concert. Reicha knew and performed with Beethoven and was admired by many literati and composers of the early nineteenth century. Reicha's Quintet is typical of his elegant compositional style and reveals the reasons his music made him a popular figure in Parisian salons in the 1830s.

Windscape's performance of the beautiful lines in the Quintet's first movement displayed the lyrical skills Reicha's music demands. The phrasing characterizing each of the movements bears a distinctly Classical nuance the nineteenth-century Europeans approved, and **the satisfying musical excitement in all four movements of this work, resulting from the technically-sparkling, florid passages performed by all the players, might have pleased the Parisians as much as Windscape's brilliant treatment of these passages pleased the Fletcher Theater audience.**

Antonín Dvořák's richly-melodic String Quartet in E-flat, Op. 51, arranged for wind quintet by Windscape's French horn player, David Jolley, **brought this impeccably-performed concert to a thunderous conclusion.** The Quintet's performance of this piece provided a summary of the artists' abilities to maintain the **finest ensemble playing many of us have ever heard.** **The rendition revealed their technical skills in expressive andantes as well as exciting, dazzlingly rapid allegros, and demonstrated that ensemble players can also be inspiring soloists.** Moreover, in their rollicking expression of Dvořák's warm, nationalistic folk tunes, **these great musicians permitted themselves to enjoy the music they played so well.** This same enjoyment shone through their performance of the serene Allegro, the sharply-contrasting slow and fast sections of the Dumka-elegie, the meditative lines of the Andante con moto, and the boisterous dance tunes and rhythms of the Finale. **The standing ovation which met the close of this concert revealed that the audience knew how to value the great musical art and the artists they had been privileged to hear.**