TORONTO STAR
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Wind quintet debuts with talent and taste

Jul. 28, 2006. 01:00 AM

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CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

One of the most compelling chamber concerts of the year turned out to be one of the most overlooked musical dates as well last night.

It was the debut of a new classical quintet, the Network Winds, at the Glenn Gould Studio. Made up of first-rank artists who either live in Toronto or have close ties to it, the small ensemble showed itself to be huge on talent, taste and intelligent programming.

Leslie Newman (on flute and piccolo), Kathy Halvorson (oboe and English horn), Micah Heilbrunn (clarinet), Nadina Mackie Jackson (bassoon) and Wendy Limbertie (French horn) — along with guest contrabassoon player Fraser Jackson — chose works from the 20th and 21st centuries that combined to show off the full spectrum of tonalcolour and contrapuntal effect that their instruments can offer.

And, contrary to what most people think of music written in the past 80 or so years, everything on the program was easy and fulfilling listening.

The small audience knew it was in for something special when the five main players dug into the fabulous rhythmic romp that opens the *Six Bagatelles for Wind Quintet* written in 1953 by recently deceased Hungarian composerGyörgy Ligeti.

That work's six movements are alive with contrasting textures and atmospheres. The writing also throws all kinds of difficulties at the performers.

It was a theme on the program that would repeat in the playful *Sonata for Clarinet and Bassoon* by Francis Poulenc(1899-1963), the languorous *Summer Music* of Samuel Barber (1910-1981), which evokes the season as superbly as his bigger-scale *Knoxville, Summer of 1916*, and the *Kvintet*, Op. 43 of Danish composer Carl Nielsen (1865-1931).

The program closed with a new work by Montreal bassoon virtuoso and teacher Mathieu Lussier, the *Sextet for Wind Quintet and Contrabassoon*. Firmly tonal and with a neo-classical structure, Lussier's work created a lush, common colour filled with playful passages.

The Network Winds have arrived in style. Long may they play together.

Additional articles by John Terauds

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