

Chamber music at New Hazlett

Belcea Quartet plays in “Bridges” series

The New Hazlett Theater on the North Side of Pittsburgh has a new boarder — chamber music. Beginning this season, chamber music arrived at the New Hazlett with the Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society’s four-concert series, “Bridges.”

The Bridges concert last Monday night featured the young Belcea Quartet, from London’s Royal College of Music. The group treated the audience to Haydn’s Quartet No. 27 and Benjamin Britten’s second and third quartets, pieces with which the players are intimately familiar and recorded for EMI Music.

In 1996, the musicians worked on the quartets with members of the venerable Amadeus Quartet, the group the ailing Britten chose to premiere his third quartet — and final major work — in 1975.

Violinist Laura Samuel reflected on working with the group, writing in the program notes, “It was a meeting that had a profound effect on us all both musically and personally. Their meticulous attention to detail and genuine affection for the music was infectious.”

It was evident that the elderly members of the Amadeus Quartet had instilled their affection in the young musicians of the Belcea Quartet, whose affinity for Britten’s music was on full display at the New Hazlett Monday night.

The Belcea Quartet allowed Britten’s deliberately constructed third quartet to unfold and speak for itself. Actors as well as musicians, the quartet members leaned toward or away from each other to give visual cues to the music. At the beginning of the piece, the second violinist and violist glared at each other as they played their dysfunctional parts with jagged rhythms and overlapping pitches.

The Hazlett proved to be a perfect venue for chamber

music, preferable to Carnegie Music Hall, which is often too large for string quartets. The Belcea musicians didn’t have to overplay and sacrifice nuance for volume, which served the Haydn well. Monday night, the audience, the first row of which was nearly level with the performers and only a few feet away, could hear every whisper, articulation, and trailing off, and see every movement of the fingers as the musicians played.

In the sparse third movement of the third quartet, the first violin’s extended soliloquy, accompanied by only one person playing long, sustained notes, the bow moving at about a centimeter per second, was completely audible in the hall. The sparseness made the piece’s middle section, which began after the virtually silent three-minute soliloquy, all the more bizarre and colorful with its contrasting pizzicato, swirling cello glissandi, trills, and staccato notes, all of which were vibrant in the hall.

The evening ended with Britten’s second quartet, written in 1945, 30 years before his third. The piece ended with one of the violins playing the movement’s earlier melody, which clashed against the repeated C major chords played by the rest of the ensemble and refusing to resolve. But the theme eventually resolved to C major; the four triumphant C major chords that end the piece were brilliant, showcasing the ensemble’s perfect intonation, and the hall allowed the resonance of the chords and the ringing of the instruments to hang in the air.

The Chamber Music Society will continue the “Bridges” festival next year, so audiences can look forward to experiencing chamber music in the intimate New Hazlett again.

Matthew E. Campbell | Copy Staff

The Belcea Quartet, a young British musical group, performed last Monday at the New Hazlett Theater as part of the Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society’s four-concert series, “Bridges.”



Courtesy of Sheila Rock



Paperhouse

On vegetables

I remember walking home from high school one afternoon six years ago, listening to Sonic Youth’s *Washing Machine* on my Discman. Somehow, despite the insistence of all the press I had read and the recommendations of my friends, I hadn’t really been into *Daydream Nation*, the band’s landmark album that is supposedly its most influential, if not its best.

I had this odd habit at the time that I feel other people might understand. When I’d get a new album, if it was good, I’d only listen to the first half of it for months. At that age, I would get obsessed with new music easily and, honestly, the first few tracks on my favorite albums kept me busy for weeks. Anyway, at this point, six years go, I hadn’t actually gotten around to listening to the last track on *Washing Machine*, “The Diamond Sea.”

What took me over at first was the simplicity of the composition. The characteristic mirroring of the vocal line in the guitar and the simple drumming were absolutely beautiful. The guitars were restrained and almost gentle. I continued listening and was probably daydreaming about something unrelated when I suddenly started paying attention again: Around six or seven minutes into the track — the piece is about 19 minutes long — I realized what I was listening to. It was noise. A straight-up wall of distorted noise. There was no melody, no vocals. This was the first time ever that I truly enjoyed listening to noise.

Since this incident, I’ve learned two important lessons about listening to music. First, albums may contain hidden treasures. It is my duty as a seeker of awesome sounds to find these treasures if they exist. Second, foreign genres of music are just like vegetables. You hate them when you’re young, refuse to try them, and hate them when you do. Then on some odd day you randomly eat something with broccoli in it, declare it tasty, and recoil in horror at the sudden cognitive dissonance.

One of my favorite places on the Internet to get served up musical vegetables is www.muxtape.com, a sort of online mix tape simulator. The premise of the site is simple: You get one username and 12 MP3 uploads, none of which can be over 10 megabytes large. After uploading songs you can change their order and share your username with your friends who can then get on the site and stream the tracks you put up in their browser. There are no comments, no stats, and no contact info for the muxtape makers. The front page of the site has links to a random selection of tapes, which I’ve been having a lot of fun exploring. Since they’re all made by people, the track selections are often very eclectic and fun.

David Hartunian | Special to The Tartan

top 10 on WRCT 88.3 FM

most played albums of the last week

- 1 Crystal Castles — *Crystal Castles*
- 2 Sian Alice Group — *59.59*
- 3 Deerhunter — *Fluorescent Grey EP*
- 4 Clark — *Turning Dragon*
- 5 Cut Copy — *In Ghost Colours*
- 6 Cat Power — *Jukebox*
- 7 Vampire Weekend — *Vampire Weekend*
- 8 The Raveonettes — *Lust Lust Lust*
- 9 Nobuko Hori — *xtoyourmilkyhair*
- 10 Jens Lekman — *Night Falls Over Kortadala*