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MUSIC REVIEW: Symphony Stars shine on 3

BY BILL JONES SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

LITTLE ROCK — The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Chamber Series began its season with a perfectly balanced program by Symphony Stars on Tuesday evening at the

Clinton Presidential Center Great Hall. Three works, from the early 18th century to the early 20th century, afforded the players an opportunity to show their mastery of period styles from baroque to late Romantic.

Antonio Vivaldi's Concerto in F for Three Violins featured the three soloists - Andrew Irvin, Kiril Laskarov and Meredith Maddox Hicks - taking successive turns in the opening "Allegro" movement, with Hicks' third part delightfully extending the dialogue begun by Irvin and Laskarov. Additional strings provided solid support for the solo players. The second "Andante" movement belonged to the trio, with Laskarov's plucking establishing a graceful yet insistent rhythm. The soloists sustained their impressive unity in the final "Allegro" movement.

In the second selection, Frank Bridge's String Quartet No. 1, the Rockefeller Quartet (violinists Chris Baker and Darby DeBell, violist Katherine Reynolds, and cellist Daniel Cline) handled the English composer's experiments in chromaticism with authority. The players captured the piece's combination of lyrical impulse and internal drama with emotional richness and technical tact. Brightness and introspection alternated, building to a rhythmic urgency in the dialogue of strings in the fourth "Allegro agitato" movement.

The high point of the concert, however, was the performance of Franz Schubert's popular Piano Quintet in A ("Trout"). Pianist Tatiana Roitman charmed the audience with her firm yet light touch. She and the other players - Laskarov (violin), Reynolds (viola), David Gerstein (cello) and Barron Weir (bass) - managed to make the familiar musical comfort food seem like an entirely new dish. The players were obviously enjoying themselves as much as the audience, some of whom were quietly tapping their toes to the strains of the "Trout" theme.

This article was published today at 4:34 a.m.

Arkansas, Pages 15 on 10/06/2010

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