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Setting lends atmosphere for Chamber season's end MUSIC REVIEW

By Joyce Tamer Telegram & Gazette Reviewer

WORCESTER — The nave of All Saints Church provided a beautiful and intimate setting on Saturday night for the final concert of the Worcester Chamber Music Society's season. The musicians were surrounded on three sides by the audience and the lovely Gothic altarpiece provided the backdrop. The interesting program featured two viola, the instrument which was featured in three of the four compositions.

The Society opened the program with the Haydn String Quartet Opus 20 No. 4, played with intimacy, delicacy and a richly burnished tone quality. The sense of ensemble throughout the piece was exquisite, with beautifully shaped phrasing and polished nuance. The second movement, in particular was beautiful, led by the facile and musical playing of violinist Krista Buckland Reiser. The fourth movement showed Haydn at his most rollicking and stylish best.

Albert Roussel, a 20th-century French composer, was represented by his "Trio for Flute, Viola and Cello." The piece is harmonically and rhythmically interesting, with a varied coloristic palette. Tracy Kraus, flute, Mark Berger, viola and guest cellist Joshua Gordon gave a lively and stylish account of this charming Trio.

Viola, Viola was written by the English composer, George Benjamin in 1996 and is a tour de force for two unaccompanied violas.

The piece lacks a tonal center or regular rhythmic pattern and is incredibly difficult; but Peter Sulski and Mark Berger gave the piece a technically proficient reading, playing with a rich variety of tonal colors and a clear commitment to the relationship of the two parts.

Late in his life Brahms eschewed the larger musical forms and returned to composing smaller works.

The String Quartet in G, Opus 111, the finale on the program, is one of these late works.

The Chamber Society, now enriched by a second viola, gave a sensitive reading of this Brahms work, emphasizing the serene quality of Brahms' late work rather than the more passionate quality of his middle period. The musicians played with a rich, romantic tone, beautiful phrasing and obvious enjoyment in their music-making.

The Worcester Chamber Music Society received a well-deserved standing ovation for an intellectually challenging and musically satisfying program.

It continues to be an important and welcome addition to the cultural life of Worcester, and their 2010-2011 season will be eagerly anticipated.

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