

MUSICIANS FROM MARLBORO'

The annual "Musicians From Marlboro" concerts at the Freer Gallery are among the most invigorating events of the classical season.

Dozens of astoundingly gifted young virtuosos, all handpicked from the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont, blow into the gallery's Meyer Auditorium every winter for three performances that radiate vitality and freshness — qualities sometimes missing in their more seasoned elders.

And so it was Wednesday night, when the first installment of Marlboroans opened the series with Leos Janacek's String Quartet No. 1 ("Kreutzer Sonata"). It's an almost brutally passionate work that, played well, will take the skin off your ears, and the players turned in a suitably hotblooded performance. It was actually a bit too hotblooded at times — its emotions spelled out in capital letters, then underlined, then italicized. But even if the excesses swept away the subtleties here and there, this was playing of daring, conviction and real insight. You could do worse.

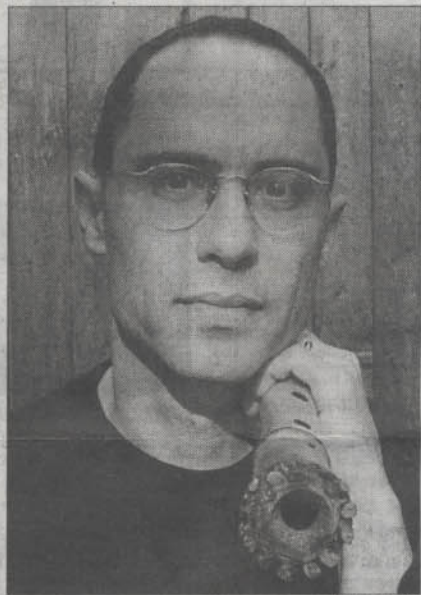
The tireless Jessica Lee, who played second fiddle in the Janacek, took the lead with a new crew of players for Mozart's String Quintet in E-flat, K. 614. Elegant and fiendishly difficult, it's not as drop-dead beautiful as Mozart's earlier quintets, but the players brought out the complex polyphony with clarity and grace. More engaging was Mendelssohn's lush Octet in E-flat, Op. 20, which violinist Scott St. John led in grand Romantic style. Impeccable ensemble work, unbridled energy and boatloads of virtuosity produced an electrifying performance — and whetted appetites for the next Marlboro concert

Graham Colton headlined an evening of singer-songwriters at Jammin' Java in Vienna.

BY JEREMY COWART



BY LISA MARIE MAZZUCCO



BY LOIS ELLISON

Violinist Jessica Lee, left, graced the Freer, and singer Raul Malo blew away the Birchmere.

in February.

— Stephen Brookes

TORI ENSEMBLE

Amid all the painful attempts to modernize traditional music — the jazzed-up Mozart, the rocked-out Verdi, the desperate pastiches that try to pass for "new" — there sometimes comes a work that reinvents traditional music with such authenticity, power and

originality that all you can do is drink it in with grateful ears.

That's what happened Tuesday night at the Freer Gallery, when the Tori Ensemble (a sui generis group comprising three Korean virtuosos and three luminaries of New York's cutting-edge music scene) performed a spectacular and utterly beautiful new work called "The Five Directions." A collaborative effort based on Asian conceptions of circulation, balance,

harmony and discord, its roots went deep into ancient Korean musical traditions: from the hypnotic rhythms of shamanistic rituals to the strange, compelling storytelling vocal music called pansori.

But this was music fully of the 21st century, in all its global, postmodernist glory. Set in five movements, it unfolded fluently and imaginatively across a kaleidoscopic range of styles, anchored in tradition but speaking an exuberant new language. Meditative solos on the geomungo — the Korean zither — would give way to racing drum duets; bamboo flutes would rise and fall with impossible delicacy; a singer would send her clear, penetrating voice over a field of electronic percussion.

It was an astounding performance, with the effect of a profound journey across centuries of culture that led firmly in the current day, and the audience exploded into cheers at the end. Superb performances by geomungo player Yoon Jeong Heo, singer Kwon Soon Kang and drummer Young Chi Min, together with the New York contingent — reeds player Ned Rothenberg, cellist Erik Friedlander and percussionist Satoshi Takeishi — made this one of the most satisfying performances of new music this season.

— Stephen Brookes

[The Washington Post]

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2008