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Chamber ensemble produces sounds both cozy and polished

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Three pieces can hardly sum up a whole genre of music, but the ones chosen by the Ronen Chamber Ensemble to end its 25th season certainly embraced a representative range of chamber music.

Some adolescent cheek from Francis Poulenc. Mozart in a playful mood, showing he could strike deep even while remaining playful. Brahms at his tensest, most energetic blend of guarded and self-revealing moods.

Tuesday night's concert carried a program title that, thankfully, was neither misleading nor cutesy. "Grand and Intimate Masterworks" hinted at the power of personal expression from both the rostrum and the love seat, the bar and the kitchen table.

This program demonstrated what chamber-music fans know well: It's about how individuals relate to each other.

To take the slightest piece first: Ronen co-founder David Bellman enlisted his Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra colleague Cathryn Gross in a spirited performance of Poulenc's Sonata for Two Clarinets. In this performance, the dialogue between the B-flat and A clarinets in the first movement had the delightful ambivalence of a focused, slightly grating encounter of close friends.

After some pastoral respite in the second, played with imperturbable calm, came the dizzying banter of the finale, with a resonant game of catch-as-catch-can easing into droll hesitation maneuvers in the final measures.

The concert opened with Bellman joined by violist Amy Kniffen and pianist Eugenio Urrutia-Borlando for Mozart's "Kegelstatt" Trio in E-flat, K. 498. Mozart's love of games gave it its nickname, but its instrumentation and surprising variety have helped it endure.

Brahms' Piano Trio in C minor, Opus 101, brought Urrutia-Borlando to the fore once again. The admirable incisiveness of his playing needed a more beguiling manner in places. But much of the compensating charm, some of it shading into pathos, came from the other two musicians, violinist Hua Jin and cellist Ingrid Fischer-Bellman.

The second movement, with its muted and pizzicato textures, was particularly enchanting. And the rhythmic zest and sense of surprise with which the finale unfolds were produced with great unity of effect by this trio of adept conversationalists.

Additional Facts

Grand and Intimate Masterworks

- » **What:** Season finale by the Ronen Chamber Ensemble.
- » **Where:** Wood Room, Hilbert Circle Theatre.
- » **When:** Tuesday night.

» **Bottom line:** Chamber music displays the breadth of its contribution to the art of conversation.
