

Times Argus Review

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BRANDON - The Stellaria Trio, one of Vermont's newest chamber music ensembles, just toured its third program meaning, perhaps, this fine ensemble is here to stay. On Saturday, pianist Claire Black, violinist Letitia Quante and cellist John Dunlop performed their intriguing "Mirth and Mystery: A Nordic Piano Trio Program" at Brandon Music. (It was repeated Sunday at Montpelier's Unitarian Church.)

While none of the three works is well known, they all had a penchant for striking rather than warm lyricism. Emblematic was Edvard Grieg's *Andante con moto* in C minor. The single movement begins simply but builds rhapsodically into a grand passion in the Romantic style of the time. Both the work and the performance were delightful.

Most importantly, the three played with real chemistry - resulting in a cohesive whole.

Jean Sibelius was represented by his early Piano Trio No. 4 in C Major, named for the town "Lovisa." Very lyrical and Romantic, the work presages the composer's more striking later harmonic language, beginning with its rich *Allegro* and closing with a passionate *Allegro con brio*. Still it was the slow movement, the rhapsodic *Andante*, that proved most rewarding by these fine players.

More intriguing, though, was the Trio in F minor by Peter Erasmus Lange-Müller. Clearly later in its harmonic language than the Sibelius, it was also less cohesive. For the first two movements Black had the pivotal role, enjoying the most developed and pianistic writing, while the string writing was simpler. Still, Quante and Dunlop intertwined their simple lines hauntingly in the slow movement, *Allegro piacevole*, complemented by the piano.

The big surprise was the complex finale, *Allegro con brio ma non troppo presto*. Here, all three enjoyed a full soap opera that worked its way into an unrelenting passion. It was certainly exciting.

It hasn't been that long since Vermont had to import ensembles to enjoy this level of performance. The Stellaria Trio is now one of a handful fine groups that we can claim as our own.

Brandon Music Music Café is a unique venue in the region. Not only is it a comfortable room to listen to music intimately, the acoustics and piano are excellent. (Brandon Music presents a variety of genres, not just classical.) And, if that weren't enough, the café offers an excellent pre-concert dinner. It makes for a most enjoyable evening.