

REVIEWS

Sylvan Winds close season with wild variation on high art

By PAUL GERARD

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Most rock or jazz musicians dabble in the "high art" world of classical music for the prestige. And I suppose we deserve "achievements" like Paul McCartney's "Liverpool" Oratorio for not giving popular music the same cultural capital as European art music.

Sigmund Snopek III, however, seems to dabble in various musical styles because of a genuine and refreshing curiosity. His "Wood-

wind Quintet in 5 Movements," which was performed Tuesday evening in the Sylvan Winds' season finale at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, is a raucous variation on the 12-tone style.

The piece is tightly structured around a six-note theme that gets scrambled anew for each movement. But it is far from analytic. There is a wild expressiveness within this precision: the dynamics follow a line that resembles a seismograph during an earthquake.

Snopek's piece was perfectly

paired with Henry Cowell's "Suite for Woodwind Quintet." Cowell enjoyed unorthodox "playing" methods as well — like rubbing the strings of a piano directly with the fingers — even though his quintet is more conventional, a series of short, single-idea miniatures that is ultimately rather dense.

The concert balanced these abstract pieces with two works that were heavy on romantic nostalgia.

Leos Janacek's sextet "Mladi (Youth)" was written when Janacek was 70, and it sounds like a

battle between memory and the past itself. The Sylvan Winds struck a perfect tone in this reading; the dramatic themes representing Janacek's childhood seemed to emerge from a haze of wistful, fragmentary motifs.

After presenting a wealth of rich ensemble playing in the first three pieces, the quintet concluded with a selection that allowed each of its members a moment or two in the spotlight. Carl Nielsen's Quintet Opus 43 concludes with a set of 10 variations on an original hymn

tune, the variations sketching personal characteristics of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet, for which it was composed.

Each member — flutist Carol Meves, oboist Brian Greene, clarinetist James Bearden, bassoonist Alex Heller and hornist Nanette Ellingson — took a turn through some fanciful, humorous, elegant, lyrical vignettes. In the end, however, it was the exquisitely balanced chorale that reaffirmed why the Sylvan Winds are one of the area's finest chamber ensembles.