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## **Mainly Mozart Festival opens in exuberant fashion**

**By David Fleshler**



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Pianist Marina Radiushina performed in the Mainly Mozart Festival's opening concert Saturday night at Gusman Concert Hall.

As the South Florida classical music season winds down, one series is just getting started.

The Mainly Mozart Festival, which runs through June 21, opened Saturday night at the University of Miami's Gusman Hall with a terrific concert of chamber works by Brahms, Strauss, Mozart and Schumann. Produced by the Miami Chamber Music Society, the series will now hold most of its future concerts at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables.

Despite the title of the festival, Mozart was represented by just a single work, the Piano Quartet in E-flat major, K. 493. The quartet's piano part is almost at the level of a concerto, with the instrument taking center stage through most of the work.

You need a first-rate musician at the keyboard, and the concert had one in Marina Radiushina, the festival's artistic director. She was joined by violist Richard O'Neill, and violinist Anna Elashvili and cellist Yves Dharamraj, the latter two members of Decoda, a chamber ensemble affiliated with Carnegie Hall.

Radiushina's smooth, exuberant playing rendered Mozart's rapid streams of notes in a joyous manner, her playing effortless but with nothing the least bit mechanical. In her hands, Mozart's melodies were naturally phrased and inflected, with a touch of Romanticism to her playing of the melodies of the second movement. The string playing came off a bit heavy in the first movement, with almost too much richness to their tone. Solo melodies in the strings seemed effortful in a way that didn't match the easy grace of Radiushina's playing. But the rich tone of the strings made for a resonant and satisfying *Larghetto*

The concert opened with an oddity, a youthful composition for string trio by Richard Strauss called *Variations on a Bavarian Folk Song*, written when he was 18. Although harmonically there wasn't much to hint at the future composer of *Salome* and *Der Rosenkavalier*, there was a quirky, bumpy rhythmic spirit to the work, a streak of originality that the musicians brought out in their vigorous, sensitively phrased performance.

Violist O'Neill next joined Radiushina for Schumann's *Fairy Tale Pictures*, a series of short movements that the two musicians rendered with great color and style. In the opening movement, Radiushina played with the flow and grace that would suit many of Schumann's solo piano compositions, while O'Neill provided a dramatic contrast with an approach that was more brusque and turbulent.

The second movement was a martial piece with lots of double stops, where the violist plays two notes at once, rendered by O'Neill in a crisp and resonant manner that left the hall ringing with the big tone of his instrument. For the third movement, a rapid perpetual motion, he played low on the bow to produce a gritty, grainy tone that added a sizzle of energy to the performance.

The concert concluded with the Brahms Piano Quartet in G Minor, Op. 25, which provided one of the highlights of the evening. The ensemble achieved a tone that was both rich and Brahmsian, yet transparent enough to let individual instruments and details come through clearly.

The first movement is big in every way—a weighted, tempestuous movement that spans a vast range, from volcanic power to brooding intimacy. The musicians did it justice, with impressive handling of the sweet-toned melodies, and grand passages that were as symphonic as you could get with only four musicians on stage. Also striking was a sense of understated power the string players brought to the pensive, rustling passages in which they are softly but rapidly crossing strings.

The Gypsy-themed last movement opened in a way that seemed rather plodding and earthbound, without much of the manic energy it has in the best performances. But that may have been simply to give the musicians room to build momentum. The music grew faster and wilder, with a break for a soulful string melody, and the sense of cascading energy led right up to the rousing close.

At the opening of the concert, organizers took time to honor Doreen Marx and Byron Krulewitch, who retired last year after running their Sunday Afternoons of Music series for 33 years.

**Mainly Mozart continues 4 p.m. May 3 at the Biltmore Hotel with violist Chauncey Patterson and the winners of the Lynn Conservatory Chamber Music Competition performing works of Haydn, Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky. [mainlymozart.com](http://mainlymozart.com) (<http://mainlymozart.com>); 786-556-1715.**

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## One Response to “Mainly Mozart Festival opens in exuberant fashion”

1. Posted [Apr 27, 2015 at 6:01 am \(#comment-239218\)](#) by *Thomas Sleeper*

Outstanding concert! Thank you for this series – We are s fortunate to have a musician of Marina Radiushina's caliber in South Florida

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