

BAMA concert raises question of 'new music appreciation'

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To the famous short list of life's certainties, one more may be added — that a concert by the enterprising Birmingham Art Music Alliance will leave the inquisitive concertgoer with deeper questions than he or she came in with.

This was once again the case at Monday's evening of recent works. Heading the issues to ruminate on was that of what might be called "new music appreciation."

For decades, contemporary music has been sequestered in what amounts to a cultural isolation booth. Those attached to the standard repertory find much 20th century music alien to their sensibilities. But the music of our time is no different in one respect from that of other eras: That which is worthwhile bears considerable fruit upon closer scrutiny.

Turn back the clock a century and think on the predicament Mahler's Fourth Symphony found itself in the first time it was played in public. The all-important first movement met with open derision from an audience utterly baffled by a musical language that our age has long openly embraced. Might that not be in store for a host of composers active today? If so, shouldn't we be liberally inclined to give some of their works at least a second or third hearing?

At Monday's BAMA concert, one wondered how long it would be before another performance of Charles Argersinger's elegantly wrought *Between Scylla and Charybdis* came along again —

MUSIC Review

★ ★ ★

THE BIRMINGHAM ART MUSIC ALLIANCE, in music of Donald Ashworth, Monroe Golden, Dorothy Hindman, Lori Neprud-Ardovino, Larry Owen, Phillip Ratliff and guest composer Charles Argersinger. At the Hoover Public Library, Monday night.

(Key to rating: ★★★★★, excellent; ★★★, good; ★★, fair; ★, poor.)

certainly, one as skilled as pianist Laura Gordy's. From a first hearing one was able to glean a keen sense of craft, a coherent vision unified by the opening motive, and a fine ear for delicate contrasts of tone. But who's to say how much more we might turn up in repeated encounters? (The former Alabama Symphony gave the premiere of the Washington State University professor's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in 1992, later recorded by members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.)

Other stimulating works included Phillip Ratliff's visionary and richly dissonant *Psalm* for cello and piano, given convincingly here by Gordy and Craig Hultgren; Dorothy Hindman's sure-handed *Trembling*, confidently rendered by solo flutist Donald E. Ashworth; and UAB student Larry Owen's *Scooter's Night Out*, whose video playback featured a succession of arrestingly gaunt found-object sculptures by Carson Lamm dominated by an imaginative soundtrack.