

---

# A Far Cry ventures from 'In Digestion' to Schoenberg

By David Weininger

Globe Correspondent / April 4, 2011

You are what you eat, so the cliché goes. But what about a piece of music? What if that, too, was what you ate?

This is, more or less, the conceit of “In Digestion,” a new piece by Japanese-born composer Shiori Usui which was premiered by the string orchestra A Far Cry on Thursday. Fascinated by the body’s interaction with food, Usui translated the sounds of grinding teeth and the workings of the stomach into an array of unusual string techniques — bowing on the bridges, snaps against the fingerboard, tapping the instruments with what appeared to be pencils. She even derived musical motives from a spectral analysis of the sound of an apple being bitten.

The description risks making the piece sound like a gimmick. In truth, “In Digestion” succeeds perfectly well without its program. It’s full of vibrant, unusual colors and short, fast-changing motifs. All of this is managed with impressive clarity in the string writing.

Usui’s piece was part of a typically adventurous program for A Far Cry in its final Jordan Hall appearance of its fifth season. It began with a lovely, understated reading of Dvorak’s Nocturne in B major for strings. Rounding out the first half was an unusual arrangement of Schumann’s cello concerto for violin and strings by cellist Orlando Jopling.

His version is a curious beast. Soloist and orchestra are even more tightly intertwined, and the structure of the piece stands out more boldly. As in all arrangements, new insights come at a cost. The orchestral coloring is necessarily one-dimensional, missing the weight and drama in Schumann’s original.

Still, it was fascinating to hear, especially in A Far Cry’s terrific rendition. They were joined by violinist Anthony Marwood, fresh off his triumph in Thomas Adès’s violin concerto with the Boston Symphony last week. He managed the difficult solo writing with total command and a natural sense for Schumann’s winding melodies. He and the Far Cry players achieved a tight, harmonious rapport, especially in the nimble last movement.

After intermission came Schoenberg’s epochal sextet “Verklärte Nacht” in its string orchestra adaptation. Playing without a conductor, as they always do, the Criers gave the best performance of this version I have ever heard. It balanced power and transparency, was beautifully paced, and immaculately played from the dark opening chords to the radiant conclusion.

One waits anxiously for whatever adventures this group has planned for its sixth season.

David Weininger can be reached at [globeclassicalnotes@gmail.com](mailto:globeclassicalnotes@gmail.com).

© Copyright 2011 Globe Newspaper Company.

---