

CONCERT NOTE

Music is the art of shaping sound as it moves and develops in time and space. Chamber music refers to music performed by a small group of instrumentalists, each playing an individual, independent part. Instead of mass and volume, the power of chamber music lies in its unsurpassed subtlety and intimacy.

This gives chamber music a special attraction for performers as well as for audiences. The experience of playing a solo part together with other solo instrumentalists provides a special pleasure to the performer in being an essential part of an intimate, coherent ensemble. String players are especially fortunate, for the quintessential exemplar of a chamber group is the string quartet, and some of the greatest literature in music has been written for that combination, often joined by a piano in combinations of three, four, or five strings. Woodwinds, instruments whose sound is produced by the player's breath, generally appear as individual additions except for the classical woodwind quintet, which includes a French horn.

The lure of playing in a chamber ensemble has led gifted performers, with mastery of other instruments than those in the traditional chamber music combinations, to form new and original groups and to develop a repertory for those groups. Last year we heard Axiom Brass, a brass quintet, and regulars at these concerts will surely remember the extraordinary "4.1" two years ago that joined a piano to four winds.

Still, many instrumentalists have been left out of traditional ensembles and some have innovated by forming different kinds of groups. The Akropolis Reed Quintet is in the forefront of this trend. Like the string quartet, all the instruments share a common means of producing sound. The five different instruments--clarinet, bass clarinet, oboe, bassoon, and saxophone--are played by blowing across one or two reeds. The sounds that result all have a similar tonal quality, what musicians call 'timbre,' that is distinctly defined and with clear outlines. This produces bold attacks and staccatos, and the ability to shape and impart nuance to a phrase or a melodic line. It also results in a more transparent interplay among the instruments, while giving the sound texture a certain homogeneity.

Concert Note by Arnold Berleant