

## Review

### Arts Renaissance Tremont: Men Who Don't Bite (February 17)

by Mike Telin



Now in its 22<sup>nd</sup> season, Arts Renaissance Tremont (ART), sponsors free concerts in the acoustically refined Pilgrim Congregational Church. ART presents a variety of classical music styles, but most importantly they take chances. Their seasons always include young performers who are at the beginning of their careers, talented student ensembles, and some things that are slightly off the beaten path. And no matter what, ART's programs draw a crowd. Case in point: on Sunday,

February 17, the Men who Don't Bite (bassoon quartet) performed a musically engaging and entertaining program that left a large audience thinking; wow! I did not know a bassoon could do that! Well at least it surprised the person who was sitting next to me. Needless to say, the Men Who don't Bite, didn't.

The first half of the program gave each of the quartet's members a chance to show off their individual virtuosity assisted by the collaborative genius of pianist and Oberlin faculty member, James Howsmon. First up, George Sakakeeny, who is professor of bassoon at Oberlin, gave a fun, vividly expressive performance of Henri Dutilleux's technically demanding *Sarabande et Cortège*. Cleveland Orchestra Assistant Principal Barrick Stees, brought a Spanish flair to the program during the *Suite Populaire Espagnole*. Stees tossed off some fiendish technical passages during his own arrangement of Bela Kovacs's *Homage a Manuel de Falla*. Jonathan Sherwin, Cleveland Orchestra contrabassoonist literally brought things down an octave as well as adding some salsa to the musical mix during Bill Douglas' *Lyric Suite*. Eric Stomberg, Associate Professor of Bassoon at the University of Kansas, offered his own operatic voice to the *Cavatina* from Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra*, transcribed by Friedrich Berr.

The program's second half was devoted to ensemble music. Anyone who heard Chanticleer's magnificent performance of some Gesualdo madrigals at the Cleveland Museum of Art might raise an eyebrow about hearing the composer's music played by an ensemble of bassoons, but Barrick Stees's arrangements of *3 Madrigals and 1 Response* certainly put any doubts to rest. The quartet was joined by Oberlin students Briana Lehman and Hunter Gordon for the five and six voice pieces.

The quartet's performance of Eric Stomberg's arrangement of the *Theme and Variations* from Schubert's *Piano Quintet, op 114, "Trout,"* was simply astonishing. George Saka-keeney proved himself to be an astute arranger. The *Andante from String Quartet No. 1 Op. 11* by Tchaikovsky was exquisite. The second movement of the *Quartet in g minor, Op. 10 Assez vif et bien rythme* arranged by Eric Stomberg demonstrated the quartet's agility.

No bassoon quartet concert would be complete without a work by Peter Schickele and this was no exception. *Blue Set No. 2* was the perfect way to send an audience merrily on their way. The Men Who Don't Bite sounded just enough like saxophones to make the work's first movement, *Bassooner or Later*, sound like a big band. They brought a swagger to the slow, laid back *Portlandia in Cerulean* and the finale, *Gang of Wolves*, a boogie-woogie with a little Mozart Bassoon Concerto thrown in was, as it should have been, over the top.

*Published on clevelandclassical.com March 5, 2013*