

Festival bets on young composers

BY MARK STRYKER
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The Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival champions living composers through an annual residency that has showcased such front-rank voices as John Corigliano, William Bolcom, Elliott Carter and Stephen Hartke, as well as leading younger lights such as this year's entry, Lera Auerbach. On another front, the festival promotes young ensembles through its Shouse Institute.

The festival has now grafted both ideas into a third initiative, the Stone Composer Institute, which promises a yearly world premiere by an emerging composer performed by a Shouse ensemble. It's a terrific idea, another way the festival is funneling its means and prestige into the creation of more new works — the true future of classical music. The program had its coming out party Tuesday with the premiere of Uriel Vanchestein's String Quartet.

Born in Montreal of French-Canadian stock, the 25-year-old Vanchestein studies composition and clarinet at Juilliard. In three hefty movements, his quartet is cast in traditional forms and early 20th-Century harmony and uses a four-note figure as a linking de-

vice. As with most young composers, his influences cast large shadows, especially Ravel, but also Bartok and maybe Hindemith. And his ideas didn't always justify their length.

Having said that, Vanchestein has a sharp ear for yearning, songful melody and supple textures. There were two walking-on-eggshell passages in the opening movement — one led by soft harmonics in the first violin, the other by a sauntering pizzicato (plucked) cello bass line — that stuck in the ear. The central movement featured more pizzicato strings, a taste of syncopation and refined opulence. One of the composer's best ideas was ending with a restless adagio, a melange of harmonic color and song that contained the strongest hints of an original voice. The Harlem String Quartet gave the work a bold, sensitive reading.

Elsewhere, a trio paced by violinist Ani

Kavafian's warm intensity gave Clara Schumann's rarely heard Piano Trio in G minor a sweetly shaped performance that featured Schumann's natural flow of lyricism. Another set of players infused Brahms' Piano Quartet, Op. 26, with a rush of passion, sometimes in focus, sometimes not, but always expressive.

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Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival

★★★
out of four stars
Tuesday
St. Hugo of the Hills
Bloomfield Hills
Festival continues
through June 20
248-559-2097
greatlakeschambermusic
.org