



RIVER OAKS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Inaugural Concert

The River Oaks Chamber Orchestra's inaugural concert began with a work not listed in the program, Rossini's overture to *The Italian in Algiers*. After a few opening pizzicatti chords, the soaring, lyrical melody is played by the oboe, certainly a dream come true for Alecia Lawyer who both founded the ensemble and serves as its principal oboist.

River Oaks Chamber Orchestra, their cool acronym being ROCCO, sets out to bridge "the intangible separation between stage and audience." This was deftly carried out with clever touches throughout the concert. Aside from a request to turn off cell phones, we were practically encouraged to fidget. No elitism here. The house-lights stayed up so one could rifle through the program and learn some fun facts including why Scott Yoo became a conductor and just how a person goes about getting a flute degree.

But mostly the audience was riveted to the stage. Ms. Lawyer shared the limelight with friends from Houston and several from out-of-town, including three of the quartet in Edward Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro for String Quartet and String Orchestra*. Richly complex, the concerto-grosso opens with a Welsh-sounding melody followed by an intricate fugue, formidable for most performers. The ensemble locked in with clear and biting phrasing. Yoo handled the orchestra with excellent technique, sometimes dispensing with the stick altogether.

Flute soloist Christina Jennings compared Charles Griffes' *Poem* to a "beloved children's book." Composed in 1918, this modal work nods to the Impressionists with exotic, shimmery lines for the flute and strings with dabs of color from the horns and snare drum. Ms. Jennings played with confidence and stunning ease, although the booming quality of St. John the Divine's sanctuary contributed to her sound getting swallowed with only a buzzy vibrato penetrating.

Franz Schubert composed his fifth symphony when he was still in his teens. Tuneful and upbeat, the sparsely-scored work firmly resides in the classic era and was ideal for the energetic and enthusiastic ROCCO forces. The evening closed with another work of Elgar; *Chanson de Nuit*, which, though more languid and reflective, was accessible and pleasing. — Alison Young