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A Provocative Flute-And-Piano Program In The Nasher Soundings Series

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By Scott Cantrell

The Nasher Sculpture Center's Soundings concert series presents sophisticated mixes of often challenging newer fare with older music, with generally excellent imported performers.

The flutist Marina Piccinini and pianist Andreas Haefliger, who also happen to be husband and wife, presented a particularly provocative program Friday night. Offhand, with admittedly fallible memory, I couldn't remember any previous area performances of pieces by the late Pierre Boulez or Elliott Carter or the very much alive Englishman Thomas Adès. Context was supplied by familiar flute-and-piano sonatas by Franck and Prokofiev.

The Franck, dating from 1886 (and originally for violin and piano), is all about soaring melody and lush harmony, with some moments of passion. The Prokofiev, from 1943, is alternately playful and wistful, in French-influenced idioms.

Via different means and to different ends, all four of the edgier pieces make much of contrasts. Carter's 1991 *Scrivo in vento* ("writing in the wind"), for unaccompanied flute, echoes the jarring juxtapositions of the Petrarch sonnet that inspired it. Slow-motion notes brush up against frantic shrieks and scurries, textures varied with flutter tonguing and multiphonics (sounding two pitches at once).

Haefliger got a solo outing in Adès' 1992 *Darkness Visible*, which fragments a song by the 17th-century Englishman John Dowland in extremes of pitch and texture, mixing gentle flutters, bright jabs and trills.

The Boulez *Sonatine* for flute and piano, from 1946, helped establish the composer as an *enfant terrible* of postwar French music. It's modern music at its most recondite, pitches and even rhythms organized in complex systems, again making much of stark contrasts.

Marc-André Dalbavie, a Boulez protégé, was represented by the 2012 *Nocturne*. Influences from minimalism are evident in descending and ascending scales, and in fragrant arpeggiated chords.

Piccinini and Haefliger are both accomplished and expressive musicians, and apart from a sluggish slow movement in the Franck the performances were all that could be wished. But they were sonically suffocated by that cramped, acoustically dry auditorium in the Nasher's basement. It was like hearing music in a clothes closet. Programs of this interest and musicianship of this quality deserve a space where the music can bloom and breathe.

Scott Cantrell, former classical music critic of The Dallas Morning News, has also written for The New York Times and numerous music magazines.