

Music REVIEW

SummerMusic cavorts with plenty of attitude

By **JOAN BUNKE**
CRITIC AT LARGE

There's summer music, tra-la-la and waltz, waltz, waltz. And then there's SummerMusic, Bruce Brubaker-style. In the former you get to frolic musically, in the latter you get to listen to contemporary composers cavort and explore musically.

Thursday night's first of two concerts in SummerMusic 1998 featured music with an attitude: a 25-minutes-plus piece by the formidable John Adams (no, not the easy "The Chairman Dances") and a John-Adams-sound-alike piece by American expatriate composer Frederic Rzewski. Both works were played with fearless passion.

In the four years since New York-based pianist and Juilliard faculty member Brubaker began SummerMusic, the Des Moines native has shown himself to be a programmer who likes to take risks. At the same time, his summer concerts lets us hear new young artists. That was true of Thursday's concert before some 100 listeners in Cowles-Kruidenier Auditorium of the Iowa Historical Building.

Cellist Julie McGinnis, assistant professor of cello at Drake University, collaborated with pianist Brubaker in a stirring, moody performance of Franz Liszt's "La lugubre gondola." In this very "live" auditorium, cellist McGinnis skillfully managed the sound dynamics and the rich tonal qualities of her instrument. That solid technique gave the Liszt an eerie, haunting sound — one that all listeners were enveloped by.

Brubaker calls Adams' "Phrygian Gates," that

25-minute solo work, "unquestionably one of the greatest piano pieces written in the last 50 years." Listening to it is like climbing a mountain, the first stages are easy, light and high, the peak is difficult, heavy and low, and when you've done that mountain, there's a whole other range of mountains to climb. Only a pianist knows just how great it might be.

The Rzewski work, titled "Les Moutons de Panurge" ("The Sheep of Panurge"), featured cellist McGinnis, New York violinist Judith Ingolfsson and violist David Wallace. The musicians are instructed to play together with sheeplike deliberation, then run free in the final movement. As in the Adams, the musical forms are repetitive and much less controlled than one expects musical sheep to be. They are, in fact, very noisy critters.

For contrast, Wallace abandoned his viola at intermission and, because he's a fan of Texas-style fiddling, fiddled up a storm with three pieces in the Historical Building lobby — to much applause.

The program's second half returned listeners to the comfortable, beautiful chamber-music precincts of Beethoven, with Ingolfsson, McGinnis and Wallace giving the Trio in E-Flat Major (Op. 3) all of the lyricism, drama, melody and variety of the very early Beethoven.

The "Moutons" piece will be repeated in the second and last SummerMusic 1998 program, at 8 p.m. Saturday in the auditorium. Also programmed are works by J.S. Bach, Morton Feldman and Robert Schumann.

Joan Bunke can be reached at (515) 284-8535 or bunkej@news.dmreg.com