

The New York Times

© 2007 The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2007

WEEKEND Arts MOVIES PERFORMANCES

Leaping Borders, Stylistic And Global



JENNIFER TAYLOR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Daniel Schnyder at the Kosciuszko Foundation.

The Lyric Chamber Music Society of New York is celebrating its 10th anniversary with a season built around the notion of music as a universal language, with programs focusing either on a single country or region, or on the interplay among several. Concerts have been devoted to French and American music, and explorations of German, Austrian, Cuban and Russian works are scheduled through the spring. But the society's program at the Kosciuszko Foundation on Wednesday evening was about crossing boundaries, geographical as well as stylistic.

ALLAN KOZINN
—
MUSIC REVIEW

Daniel Schnyder, the saxophonist and composer, led the performance, which was fully devoted to his own music. Mr. Schnyder's style is rooted in the improvisatory give and take of jazz, tempered by a fascination with world music. His soloists were Yang Jing, who plays the pipa (a Chinese lute), and Basam Saba, who performed on the oud (an Arabic lute), the ney (a Middle Eastern wooden flute) and the Western flute. The rest of the ensemble — a string quartet,

Lyric Chamber Music Society
of New York
Kosciuszko Foundation

bass and percussion — was less exotic.

From the makeup of the roster, a listener might have expected a performance akin to one of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road programs. But mostly, and perhaps not surprisingly, Mr. Schnyder's jazz style dominated, with other accents prevailing only when he stepped out of the spotlight. In the three-movement opening work, "Zoom In," the string and percussion ensemble at first supported Mr. Schnyder's solo lines with the brash, sinewy timbres of a jazz group. It later softened to suggest a 1940s tea room orchestra in a Cuban-inspired movement and a lilting choros band in the closing Brazilian pastiche.

"Traveling East," with Ms. Yang playing the pipa and Mr. Saba on the oud, was a more successful hybrid, with a striking duet between Mr. Saba and Mark Feldman, a violinist who played with a consistently rich tone, and inventive solo passages for the pipa, alternating between bent notes and tremolando figures.

Mr. Schnyder and Mr. Saba also revisited Mr. Schnyder's "Concerto for Ney," which they had played memorably (and with a larger band) at an Absolute Ensemble concert at Damrosch Park in August. The easy interplay between modal Middle Eastern melodies and free-spirited jazz is striking here, and the intimacy of the Kosciuszko Foundation's concert room put the spotlight on another element: string writing that hinted at the Weimar cabaret music of Kurt Weill. Mr. Saba played the heavily ornamental solo line with an appealing grace and warmth, qualities he also brought to his Western flute playing in "Oyan I and II," a set of zesty Turkish dances for the full ensemble.

Mr. Schnyder's showpiece for Ms. Yang, "Mozart in China," moved easily between string writing tinged with Viennese Classicism and fleet-fingered pipa virtuosity, both in a traditional Chinese style and in passages built on Mozartean themes. And another ensemble piece, "Cairo," drew its energy from vital, rich-hued solo playing by Gregor Hübner, a violinist, and Mike Block, a cellist.

The next Lyric Chamber Music Society concert is an all-Mendelssohn program on Feb. 6 at the Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 East 65th Street, Manhattan; (212) 366-6900, Ext. 206, or lyricnyc.org.