

World Premieres, Sure, but Room for Older New Music Too

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The Da Capo Chamber Players, like most new-music ensembles, do plenty of commissioning, and no doubt just as much filling out of grant applications to cover the expense. At its performance on Tuesday evening at Merkin Concert Hall, the group played a half-dozen of the scores composed for it since 1979. Two of the works, Gene Pritsker's "Self Laceration" and Chandler Carter's "Conversation Piece," were world premieres, and a third, Eric Chasalow's Flute Concerto, was given its first New York performance.



Hiroyuki Ito for The New Times

The Da Capo Chamber Players: from left, Patricia Spencer, Blair McMillen, David Bowlin, André Emelianoff and Meighan Stoops.

Of the new works Mr. Pritsker's "Self Laceration" (2006) was the most immediately striking, its off-putting title notwithstanding. It begins with a rhythmically insistent, irresistibly zesty movement in which the focus moves briskly around the ensemble. The clarinet, violin, cello, flute and piano each have exposed lines that capture the character of the instrument and create a lively dialogue. The individual instruments speak in distinct, idiomatic voices.

Mr. Chasalow's Flute Concerto (2005) packs a lot of ideas into 15 minutes. Its movement titles — "Flight and Confusion," "Eggshell, More Like a Heart" and "Feather, Breath, Mirror" — look impressionistically vague on paper, but Mr. Chasalow's appealingly symmetrical writing evokes them in a painterly way, by making vibrant, sharply articulated textures morph into stretches of wispy lyricism and back. Patricia Spencer played the solo line with a deft command of both technique and timbre.

Mr. Carter's "Conversation Piece" (2006) is based on his chamber opera, "The Sister," and has a decidedly operatic quality: as in Mr. Pritsker's work, the instruments suggest specific, sharply drawn characters in a fluid drama, and their lines have the angular, anxious quality of contemporary vocal writing. The players also make fragmentary spoken contributions, and if they offer only the barest glimpse into the missing libretto, the real action is in the shapely instrumental dialogues.

All three new works drew on a rigorous harmonic and rhythmic language, tempered by a lyrical eclecticism that rounded off the potentially harsh edges, and gave the pieces a direct appeal. The older scores worked similarly, with the exception of [Philip Glass](#)'s "Modern Love Waltz" (1980), which burred along pleasantly in Mr. Glass's consonant style, in an ensemble arrangement by Robert Moran. Philippe Bodin's "Peal" (2000) opened the program with an explosion of brash timbres and insistent rhythms that gradually melted into softer textures. And Stephen Jaffe's three-movement "Nonesuch Serenade" (1984), an essay in constant textural shifting, prefigured the essentially vocal style of Mr. Carter's score.

Besides Ms. Spencer, the group's superb players are Meighan Stoops, clarinetist; David Bowlin, violinist; André Emelianoff, cellist; and Blair McMillen, pianist. In Mr. Chasalow's work Michael Adelson conducted, and Thomas Kolor was the percussionist.