

# SCENE & HEARD

★★★★☆

## GOLIARD ENSEMBLE

Friday  
Hill Recital Hall  
Birmingham-Southern College  
The Hugh and Barbara Thomas  
Master Class Series

### MUSIC REVIEW

## Ensemble performs eclectic, uneven show with rich vocals

By PHILLIP RATLIFF

For *The Birmingham News*

The New York-based Goliard Ensemble returned to Birmingham-Southern College to perform an eclectic, occasionally uneven concert of new music, mid-20th century folksong arrangements and a couple of Classical-era gems.

The ensemble's unconventional makeup surely contributed to the concert's uneven programming. The Goliard adds to a standard piano trio a mezzo-soprano (realized by the brilliant Ricky Ryerson) and, sometimes problematically, a saxophone.

It was easy to imagine the saxophone functioning the way an English horn (or for that matter, a saxophone) does when used in a symphony orchestra. Instead, the saxophone spent most of its time wishing it were a viola, providing an inner voice that filled out the harmonies but often craving a role as supplier of soulful obbligatos.

Birmingham-Southern faculty composer Dorothy Hindman realized the full potential of the entire Goliard in her continuous song cycle, "The Pillow Book." Hindman derived the tonal materials for the 15-minute piece from pentatonic and whole-tone scales and framed her tunes and chords with string harmonics and other effects. Lyrical melodies structured around hard-to-miss climaxes give "The Pillow Book" its momentum. While the piece was conceived as a series of short episodes, the overall result was seamless and organic.

The Goliard also found success in its performances of pieces by Beethoven and Rossini. Arielle Levioff — pianist, Goliard artistic director and all-around musical wonder — led her ensemble in a lithe, nuanced performance of Beethoven's Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 70, No. 1. The Goliard's slightly off-kilter arrangement of Rossini's "Crude sorte" from "L'italiana in Algeri" was equally satisfying.

Attempts to describe the rich, luxurious voice of Ryerson ran the risk of sounding like advertising copy for Godiva chocolates. Suffice it to say that Ryerson's performance provided a delightfully rich, complex, melt-in-your-ear experience — one that trumped the piece's saxophone identity crisis.