

Arc Ensemble at Rosenthal Center

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Cincinnati's three-year-old Arc Chamber Ensemble, led by founder/director Demetrius Fuller, pursues its mission of showcasing 20th-century music as ensemble-in-residence at the new Lois and Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art.

As the new Lois and Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art spectacularly demonstrates, contemporary visual art caught up with popular taste long ago.

The same has not been true of contemporary music.

Committed to changing that is Cincinnati's three-year-old Arc Chamber Ensemble.

Ensemble-in-residence at the Rosenthal Center, Arc and its founder/director Demetrius Fuller performed their second concert of the season Thursday night in the CAC's lower level "black box" theater.

The 2,366-square-foot facility, which will play host to theater, film and dance as well as music, welcomed Schoenberg, Kurt Weill and American composer Dorothy Hindman as advocated by Fuller and his 15-member group.

Guest artist was German violinist Tanja Becker-Bender in Weill's Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra.

The 1924 work is representative of the pre-Broadway Weill ("Lady in the Dark," "Street Scene"), though hints of his later, more theatrical idiom emerge. Echoes of Stravinsky are not hard to find either ("L'Histoire du Soldat") as in the occasional, march-like irony of the first movement.

Becker-Bender played it with considerable flair, slip-sliding into quasi-cabaret mode in its melodic moments, while projecting the visceral excitement of its more agitated ones. The Arc players filled it with

color, including a wry, witty xylophone solo in the second movement.

Hindman's 1993 "Chemistry" was a regional premiere. Underpinned by piano and vibraphone, it is tightly woven with a gentle flow of motives and ideas, rather like molecules in solution. Fuller gave it graceful pacing, allowing its contrasting colors – strings, winds, brass and percussion - to emerge clearly.

Schoenberg's 1906 Chamber Symphony for 15 solo instruments is pivotal for its departure from overblown late romantic style. Challenging to perform, the Arc players read it with considerable proficiency, lacking only a final sense of cohesion. Fuller kept the intensity going, however, and brought it to an exciting, emphatic conclusion.

Arc's next concert, "American Jazz" with Howard Levy, harmonica, and Anthony Molinaro, piano, in selections from their CD "Live," is Jan. 29 at the CAC.