

## The Point of Chamber Music

**Chamber music** is an old-fashioned term for a variety of musical genres performed by small ensembles. “Chamber music” brings to mind gentlemen in satin knee pants and powdered wigs playing Mozart to a distinguished assemblage of 18th Century nobility in a mirrored and heavily ornamented room. Today’s chamber music, however, is more likely to be three, four or five musicians playing Mozart or perhaps Thelonius Monk to three or four hundred people who enjoy an art form that is very much 21st century.

The whole point of chamber music is the ensemble: whether playing the traditional stringed instruments of violin, cello and viola or any permutation of woodwinds, horns, piano, guitars, percussion, voices or harpsichord, each musician must be a virtuoso – because each musician is heard.

Today’s chamber music might be jazz, atonal compositions, or any number of forms and harmonies. It may include the familiar sonatas that call up treasured memories, or it may require careful listening to detect themes and counterpoints. It often is to traditional music what haiku is to traditional poetry: leaner, more evocative, making the mind turn a corner to understand it.

The audiences are challenged, attuned to subtleties rather than orchestral magnificence. They come to hear and understand an art in which a perfect harmony or a jarring dissonance can delight their brains. And chamber music offers a connection to the audience: there is no conductor, just absolute coordination among the performers, a coordination that is as polished as a much loved antique teaspoon or as refractory as a chandelier prism. When chamber music is performed well, not even the dropping pin can be heard; the audience does not miss a note or a chord.

Chamber music is different and its audience, of whatever age, education, ethnicity or locale, has the expectation of an emotional and emotive experience shared with the musicians and the composer. That’s the point.

**Submitted by Eileen Lundin, a member of the SACMS Board**