

# MozART group: Great Fun at Thalian Hall

## EVENT INFORMATION

By **Barry Salwen**

**November 3, 2019 - Wilmington, NC:**

The [MozART Group](#) invaded historic [Thalian Hall](#) with musical humor and craziness. This group is a string quartet of highly professional players who decided to put some insanity into classical music, "despite the sober formality of great concert halls, despite the boredom of a classical musician's life" to quote their self-description. They were trained in Poland, came together as an ensemble in 1995, and for much of that twenty-plus years have been touring to more and more countries. Their most recent DVD, released in 2017, is titled *Mozart Comes to Town*.

So, let's get things straight at the beginning. This group is funny. And they are expert. They jostle musical styles, perpetrate antics with their instruments, put on skilled physical routines, and on numerous occasions had the audience laughing out loud.

The opening gambit of their well-attended show, lasting about 75 minutes without an intermission, was three of the players appearing onstage, then looking in puzzlement for the cellist. Without him, their confusion not assuaged, they began playing Boccherini. The cellist finally arrived and jumped into a frenzied chaos completely contradictory to the elegant music the others had just been playing. Then they picked up with what turned out to be the leitmotif of the program, Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*. This segued into bluegrass-style music with virtuosic yodeling by the second violinist.

And so it went. Their program was a *mélange*, a medley of musical styles juxtaposed, sometimes smoothly, sometimes taking the listener by surprise. There was some resemblance in this to Victor Borge, perhaps the touchstone of musical comedy and parody. But whereas Borge had extremely funny verbal routines, this group barely spoke. They sang, plucked their instruments like banjos, held up funny signs, and engaged in physical entertainments that were surprising and sometimes impressive. In this they were like the two protagonists of the musical play *Two Pianos Four Hands*, which opened in the same year that The MozART Group came together. In that show the two multi-talented protagonists engage in a variety of physically challenging routines, along with skilled piano playing done from memory.

There were so many musical selections that this cultivated listener recognized many, yet still not all of them. The variety was part of the fun, as Bach morphed to ragtime to the "Blue Danube Waltz." Or the "Colonel Bogey March" (which listeners probably remembered from a gasoline commercial of yesteryear) edged into Dvořák and then into "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head." Then there were the funny faces, the dancing in their chairs with legs that sometimes looked like gummi dolls, and rhythmically flawless body percussion.

We will not try to list all the memorable moments. One was when the players made their instruments sound like seagulls, surf, and a foghorn. Another was the musical balloon. And the routine with the ping-pong ball simply has to be seen.

The first violinist's repeated inability, despite various tries, to pronounce the word "gentlemen" was a funny verbal joke. At the end of the show, a man was – so it appeared – randomly plucked from the audience to go up onstage. He handled it with aplomb and sang part of "O Sole Mio" with two of the quartet members quite surprisingly well, in a funny evocation of The Three Tenors. The program ended with part of the final movement of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, played with elegant phrasing and tone. One would have liked to hear all of it.

That artistry was an accomplishment, given all the singing, plucking, dancing, and other entertainments that had been going on. The MozART Group is, as attentive readers have hopefully noticed, expert and funny. They will be enjoyed by all listeners, musicians or not. If they come anywhere near to where you live, you just gotta go see them.