

Douglas Knehans's 'Seraphic Ride'

Conductor Sylvia Alimena led nine National Symphony Orchestra players Friday in a splendid world premiere of Douglas Knehans's "Seraphic Ride." The piece, which concluded a Kennedy Center Millennium Stage concert, was commissioned in 1999 as Alabama's winner in the NSO's American Residencies program. At the time, Knehans was chairman of the composition, theory and electronic music faculty at the University of Alabama and directed the Southern Center for Research into ElectroAcoustic Music (SCREAM). Born in St. Louis in 1957, he grew up in Australia, has degrees from Queens College (New York) and Yale University, and now heads the University of Tasmania's Conservatorium of Music.

"Seraphic Ride" is a one-movement essay for a "mini-orchestra" joining three trios of woodwinds, percussion (plus piano and harp), and strings.



Dedicated to the late Jacob Druckman, Knehans drew on the celestial imagery of that composer's "Seraphic Games," similarly anchoring his work, its direction and structure in the sonic resources of instrumental color.

The piece tells an exciting story, ever-intensifying in color, thematic ideas, texture and tempo. Paul Hindemith's influence is perceptible in the ultimate tonality of the work.

In a graceful reading of Mozart's genial Quartet in F for Oboe and Strings, K. 370, Rudolph Vrbsky was the stunning soloist. Though here the strings' vital role was muted as if walled off backstage, they lent a gentle luster to Schubert's atypically unoriginal Trio in B-flat, D. 581.

—Cecelia Porter