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A Concert's Name Player Makes Room for Friends

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By Steve Smith

The 92nd Street Y's Web site told you that the program at the Y on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday evening was called "Maurice Bourgue & Friends." That's an enticing prospect: Mr. Bourgue, a veteran French oboist, is among the world's most admired instrumentalists. But in the concert heard on Wednesday, he played a surprisingly small role, leaving much for friends old and new to do.

The first work on the program, "La Française" from "Les Nations," a delectable set of instrumental suites by the Baroque composer François Couperin, established the evening's French theme. Mr. Bourgue and the violinist Jaime Laredo were a potent pair in Couperin's graciously winding melodic lines. But the continuo, played by the cellist Sharon Robinson and by Reiko Uchida on harpsichord, felt too inflexible for Couperin's dance-derived rhythms, resulting in music that felt more hastily visited than lived in.

Things dramatically improved thereafter. The flutist Tara Helen O'Connor, the violist Daniel Phillips and the harpist **Bridget Kibbey** expertly captured the moody chiaroscuro of Debussy's late sonata for those instruments. **Ms. Kibbey, a performer who seems to revel in the sheer physicality required to coax a vast range of exacting expression from her stately instrument, was a delight to watch and to hear.**

Poulenc's Sonata for Oboe and Piano brought out the best in Mr. Bourgue and Ms. Uchida. The work, one of Poulenc's last, is a paradoxical mix of the elegiac, the suave and the clever, with an athletic middle movement inspired by the music of Prokofiev, to whom the sonata is dedicated. Mr. Bourgue's playing was bold, elegant and incisive; Ms. Uchida's, poised and peppery.

In a bracing rendition of Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello, Mr. Laredo and Ms. Robinson embraced the work's oddness, expressing in full its grating disharmonies, mechanical cog-works and dreamy melodies.

The concert closed with a heady account of Ravel's Introduction and Allegro. Mr. Laredo and Ms. Robinson formed a genteel string section with the violinist Josef Spacek and Mr. Phillips. Ms. O'Connor and the clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein flitted, chirped and warbled in concerted merriment. **And Ms. Kibbey was a marvel once more, her dramatic sweeps and robust lines repeatedly cause for shivers.**