

RADIUS ENSEMBLE

It's the music, stupid

REAL QUICK BY MICHAEL BRODEUR | MBRODEUR@WEEKLYDIG.COM

I can hardly keep track of what's happening on *Lost*, let alone cultivate a detailed understanding of several centuries' worth of important composers. Oh shit, did I just disqualify myself from writing about the Radius Ensemble? Not by their book, I didn't. My lunkheadedness in the chamber music department doesn't seem to faze them at all.

"Music is kind of unusual," Jennifer Montbach tells me, "in that educated people are encouraged to consume films and visual art and interpret them as they will—they don't need an arts degree or a master's in film. But with music, people feel like they have to be qualified to listen to it and understand it." As the artistic director and oboist for the Concord-based ensemble, Montbach has made a personal mission out of countering the built-in elitism of classical music. "We're saying that you can simply listen. What brings us together as Radius is the idea of presenting the music in such a way that people feel like they are a part of it. You're in the radius of the circle, so to speak."

It's a refreshingly forthcoming attitude in a genre rigid with reservation—or at

least seemingly so. Of course, Radius, now entering their eighth season, are anything but reserved—they don't even wear black ("a tradition that makes the musician disappear," says Montbach), which alone is pretty much the equivalent of kick-starting a Harley in the chamber. Also, where audiences are typically presented with only the music and implicit hopes that they "get it," Radius is a bit more generous, augmenting each performance with anecdotes about the composer's life and distinguishing marks of the particular piece—they might even play a few bars.

"We live and breathe this stuff, and most of our culture doesn't give a rat's ass about it," says Montbach. "But it's not the music that doesn't appeal to people, it's the concert setting. There's this sense that if you



Seen here just before setting fire to one of Frank Gehry's stupid buildings.

RADIUS ENSEMBLE
SATURDAY, 9.30.06
MIT'S KILLIAN HALL
160 MEMORIAL DR.,
CAMBRIDGE
617.792.7234
7:30PM TALK, 8PM PER-
FORMANCE/\$10-\$20
RADIUSENSEMBLE.ORG

didn't pick up on the inverse retrograde of the theme in the second movement, well, you're just an idiot."

This Saturday, the ensemble plays selections by Albert Roussel, Charles Martin Loeffler (who lived in Medfield, dude), Robert Muczynski and Clara Schumann (who may or may not have been banging Brahms on the side); and if the concert isn't a good enough time for you, there's always the after-party.

Says Montbach, "A concert should be like a meal: You should have an appetizer, you should have the main course, but you should also have some dessert." ⊗