

Pianist Sawallisch, Flutist Khaner Shine

By Daniel Webster for THE INQUIRER

The series is called "Distinctive Repertoire," and flutist Jeffrey Khaner and pianist Wolfgang Sawallisch took the title seriously Wednesday when they played works by three 20th century composers who suffered dislocations and worse during the Nazi period in Europe.

In their program at the Convention Center, Khaner, Principal Flutist for the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Sawallisch, its Music Director, played sonatas by Erwin Schulhoff, Paul Hindemith and Bohuslav Martinu before moving into period pieces from the late Romantic era. All three composers made the flute a part of complex and colorful music rather than using it as a preening siren in music where the piano simply hums along.

Khaner is a technician capable of etching each note in the most sweeping run, and of finding the shading for an expressive nod within the flow of these works. While the second half of the program exploited the flute's elegance and warmth, in the first half Khaner showed that the instrument also has fiber and strength. He was both guided and joined in that demonstration by Sawallisch, whose pianism is bold and colorful, rhythmically vital and exact.

The best of their playing in this glowing program came in the Martinu Sonata. Rich in colors, the piece invited the players to develop the cumulative power of the music through intricate rhythmic devices and bravura sections. The last movement, beginning with a big piano flurry, showed the players in seamless ensemble.

Schulhoff's Sonata ended movements with a whisper and a question rather than a declaration. Sawallisch's playing savored the big piano chords and heroic moments, while Khaner's sharpened the rhythmic devices that give the music its spring.

Hindemith's Sonata gave both players strong material to work with. Khaner made the slow movement a combination of directness and lyricism, and Sawallisch grasped the sinewy chords and intricate harmonic paths with an eagerness that was infectious.

After the intermission, they played Dvorak's transcription of his Violin Sonata (Op. 100) and Taffanel's Fantasy on Themes From "Der Freischutz". In the Taffanel music, Sawallisch used his piano to build orchestral sounds, and both pieces showed off Khaner's strong, nuanced playing, albeit in music that seemed lightweight.