

Fireworks at the Library of Congress

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If there's a patron saint of chamber music, it's undoubtedly **Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge**, whose support of this neglected genre was so strong she even built the Library of Congress an auditorium to play it in. Coolidge would have turned a sprightly 144 on Thursday, and the library marked the occasion with a performance by the **Fireworks Ensemble** -- a young octet every bit as adventurous and ahead of the curve as the revered lady herself.

The classically trained Fireworks players say they're out to "redefine the chamber music experience for a new generation of listeners" by expanding the repertoire into new areas, and this we can only applaud. The world of chamber music can feel airless, smothered in the kind of tonier-than-thou connoisseurship that makes sensible people flee for the hills, but the Fireworks players threw open the windows and let the air in. Playing everything from electric guitars to an orange kazoo, they romped through Norwegian folk songs, a Bollywood film score, some baroque dance music and a **Duke Ellington** classic, even taking a stab at the dance club electronica of **Aphex Twin** -- cleverly reverse-engineered for acoustic instruments.

It was as fresh and fun as it sounds, and when it worked, it worked beautifully. You lose a certain authenticity when, for instance, you arrange a **Haydn** string quartet for electric guitar and soprano saxophone, but it's well worth hearing at least once. And there were some fine solos, particularly by violinist **Kathryn Eberle**. Chamber music may not have been "redefined," but it definitely got a kick in the pants -- and Coolidge herself would probably have enjoyed the party.

