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"A little timely night music"

by NADINE BROZAN (NYT); Metropolitan Desk

The theme of the New England String Ensemble's debut concert on Saturday was "Musical Journey into Night," but the musicians could hardly have guessed how appropriate that title would be. The 25-piece orchestra was deep into Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" in the Endicott College auditorium in Beverly, Mass., when the lights flickered and died, a result of lightning's having struck a transformer outside the building earlier in the day.

"Everyone kept playing, even though they could see nothing," said Peter L. Stickel, the executive director of the orchestra and one of its violinists. "Then the second violinists and violas dropped out with the first violins and cellists carrying on. Then everyone stopped." But that was not the end of the concert. Because of earlier outages, the concert goers had come prepared. "We looked out and saw flashlights in the audience," he said. "Obviously, people had taken them from their cars to get to the auditorium. So I motioned them to come onstage, placed them around the orchestra, and we continued and then played a Faure nocturne."

Christophe Chagnard, the music director, who kept on conducting even when the musicians could no longer see him said: "What could have been a catastrophe turned out to be providential. That event bound us in a way nothing else could. If this is trial by fire, we passed." Now for an encore...