You might as well have picked up a comic book...

Gary Larson
Talking about The Far Side
Kresge Auditorium, 8 p.m.

By Ronald E. Becker

Larson opened with stories of his childhood, filled with visions of horrible monsters in closets. He then moved to a brief discussion of his humor as a sign of the times, remarking that growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, the impact of television produced a humor "bred in irreverence." The major part of his talk consisted of commentaries on samples of his cartoons, which were simultaneously projected on the Kresge screen. Although the content of the slides was fantastic, I had some trouble seeing all the detail from my position behind the stage. Numerous protestations by the audience finally produced a lowering of the lights which helped quite a bit.

Larson's cartoons aren't wordy and neither was his talk. Like his cartoons, though, most of the things he said were true gems. Stories of his arguments with his editor were often humorous, but some of his more off-hand comments produced the largest audience response. "You guys are sick!" he protested to the applause at the appearance of one particular panel (police bear shoving an iguana). He seemed so disturbed at it for our appreciation of his work. Through the cartoons were very good, Larson wasn't readily spirit away worldly handicaps to so readily make the most despairing listener whole?

Larson formed, during the last few years, such close relations with this best and truest friend of mankind, that his image is not only no longer terrifying to me, but is indeed very soothing and comforting," wrote H. D. Thoreau. Pro Arte gave us a glimpse of eternity, the eternity of Mozart's music and its power to rid the soul of all fear.

The Andantes' conc variations cheerfully led the audience out of the Adagio's trance; Michele Sahani's chirpy flute made everyone smile.

Mozart's Symphony No. 39 is "one of the most cheerful pieces of music that Mozart's symphonies," says the program note. Beautiful, yes, but cheerful.

Pro Arte provided a suspenseful opening to the work, their legato polished and serene. But there were daggers looming just beneath the surface, and they emerged more irritatingly in the Andante con moto. It was a disturbed touch to the elegant but troubled questions asked by passionate winds; but there was a joyful optimism to the answer from the strife-suppressing strings. Under Larry Hill's baton the relationship between strings and winds continued to develop magically as the performance progressed, anger increasingly being overcome by joy.

The Finali/Allegro was bright, but even here the music was not without its questions. Mozart at his best provides more than mere candy-flour cheeseliness; he takes us on a journey through sorrow, but does so with such rapturous beauty that his message is ultimately happy. The Pro Arte Orchestra, with Robert Browning's remark that "He sees no foe, I am invulnerable; I see no foe," said..."

Although you will miss the un-published cartoons shown at the lecture, Gary Larson's published collections of cartoons can provide you with a "grow-me-out" fix for the week.

Pro Arte proves blissful detachment from loneliness for area elderly and handicapped

Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Boston
Conducted by Larry Hill.
All-Mozart program.
Sanford Theatre, Feb. 21.

By Jonathan Richmond

It would have been nice if at this point the concert had ended, for the final events set a downhill trend. Russell Sherman came on stage after the intermission and played Mozart's Fantasia in C minor, K. 396. It was a wooden performance, as cold as the Boston Winter weather. The real horror only came after intermission, for Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 22 in C minor, K. 491, that was in complete contempt of Larry Hill's careful, intuitive approach. Sherman played with a rough bravura, attacking the piano as if it were fighting him. His cadenzas were thoroughly overdone and un-Mozartean, his attempted 19th Century romanticism misplaced to the point of vulgarity.

The Orchestra continued to play sensitively, but were overcome by the arrogance of a soloist who wanted to go alone and was more concerned with the promotion of his ego than with the transmission of Mozart's music. A shame.