

Omer Quartet | Hanzhi Wang @ YCA



Above: Hanzhi Wang

Wednesday January 29th, 2020 - For this concert in their noon-time series at The Morgan Library, **Young Concert Artists** brought together the Omer Quartet and accordionist Hanzhi Wang in a wide-ranging program.

Ms. Wang opened the performance with three Scarlatti keyboard sonatas, K. 9, 146, and 159. These amply displayed Ms. Wang's agile technique and rhythmic control. Her swift filigree passages were deftly dispatched, and the rich sound of the instrument's lowest range added an earthy dimension; in fact, the music took on an appealing - almost folkish - quality at times. Woven into the accordionist's exhilarating playing were some wonderful subtle touches. Very quickly, Ms. Wang had audience in the palm of her hand.

Alfred Schnittke's *Revis Fairy Tale*, dating from 1978, is a suite of dances which - truly - made me feel like dancing. In the first of four movements, *Chichikov's Childhood*, the music is quite melodious and feels traditional; here Ms. Wang's broad dynamic range came into play. The second movement, *Officials*, brought **SWAN LAKE** to mind...specifically, the 'four cygnets' motif. The music takes on a more 'modern' feel, with discordant passages of jazzy angularity cropping up. *Waltz* has a somber start, and the melody is low-lying. Later, one feels the waltzers might be drunk...or dotty. After a rise of passion, the music turns dour and ends with a downward slide. The concluding *Polka* was a lot of fun, with Ms. Wang breezing thru the composer's demands and winning a burst of enthusiastic applause.

Moritz Moszkowski's *Etincelles* figured in Ms. Wang's 2018 concert at Zankel Hall, and I enjoyed encountering it again today. Full of almost giddy scales, and covering the accordion's very wide range, the piece is a charming showpiece for Ms. Wang, with a witty ending.

The Omer Quartet then took the stage for a very impressive performance of Haydn's *String Quartet in G-minor*, opus 20, #3. The opening movement, *Allegro con spirito*, is full of mood swings. Immediately, the congenial blend of voices these players have achieved together assures us we are in for a treat. First violinist Mason Yu is a master of dynamic subtlety, and he and his colleagues illuminated the music in a perfectly-paced performance, with hints of hesitations here and there an added delight.

In the *Minuetto*, Mr. Yu brings sweetness of tone to the poignant violin melody whilst the other players weave harmonies tinged with sadness. In the more optimistic interlude, things cheer up a bit although minor-key twinges continue to intrude. A return to the opening mood carries the music forward, but then it seems to stop in mid-phrase.

Already at such a high level, the Omer Quartet went *beyond* in the *Adagio*, creating a palpably poetic atmosphere with playing of searing beauty. Emerging from the movement's chorale-like opening, cellist Alex Cox commences a moving line that flows among lovely harmonies. Mr. Yu's high *pianissimo* passages waft on the air, and violist Jinsun Hong and violinist Erica Tursi have opportunities to shine. Throughout, the cellist's glowing tone and expressive phrasing are captivating.



Above, the Omer Quartet: Mason Yu (violin), Jinsun Hong (viola), Alex Cox (cello), and Erica Tursi (violin).

The final *Allegro molto* is animated - even agitated - veering between major and minor, with infinitesimal hesitations along the way. The cumulative effect of the Omer's Haydn this afternoon was both musically engrossing and emotionally gratifying.

Young Concert Artists composer Katherine Balch then introduced her work for string quartet, *With each breathing*, which she said was inspired by the notion of expressing aspects of the act of breathing in musical terms. The work's title seemed somewhat ironic, but in fact the composer succeeded in her intent with music ranging from sighs and whispers to more labored and dramatic effects. The work's exploration of textures was ideally set forth by the musicians of the Omer Quartet: a composer could not ask for better advocates.

For the afternoon's finale, excerpts from *Five Tango Sensations* by Astor Piazzolla brought together Ms. Wang and the Omer Quartet; this music had figured prominently in the accordionist's 2018 Zankel Hall concert. With an intrinsic feel for both the allure and the danger that threads thru these tangos, the five musicians brought rich, haunting colours and irresistible rhythmic sway to the music.

This highly enjoyable concert ended with the artists receiving a very warm ovation. The hall's size and acoustic make it ideal for chamber music. And was that Anne-Marie McDermott seated a couple of rows in front of us?

The performance was live-streamed, and may be seen [here](#).

~ Oberon

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https://oberon481.typepad.com/oberons_grove/2020/01/omer-quartet-hanzhi-wang-yca.html