

The Omer Quartet @ Merkin Hall



Above: The Omer Quartet

New York, NY - Tuesday December 11th, 2018 - **Young Concert Artists** presenting **The Omer Quartet at Merkin Hall**. These young players had made an excellent impression in a 'calling card' performance, playing Piazzolla with accordionist Hanzhi Wang at her YCA debut concert at Zankel Hall in October. Their program tonight was expertly planned: book-ended by works of the masters of the string quartet genre (Haydn and Beethoven), with some delicious Debussy and a highly enjoyable piece by Chris Rogerson (who was a YCA Composer-in-Residence from 2010 to 2012), the Omer Quartet scored a genuine triumph.

Haydn's *Quartet No. 2/Op. 20 C-Major*, from 1772, was an ideal way to open the evening, its light and bustling start later bringing on big swirling motifs. The Omers weave lovely subtleties into the music, with tiny pauses giving a touch of suspense. A minor-key, tempestuous mid-section draws some fiery playing, which turns wistful. A soft glow infuses the return to major, with a gentle end.

The *Capriccio: Adagio* starts with the players in unison, finessed with etched-in trills. Throughout this, and the ensuing *Minuetto*, the Omers' integrated harmonies and perfectly-judged tempi gave us music-making at its finest. The Haydn closes with a sprightly fugue that leads to a final burst of energy.

Claude Debussy's *String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10*, is a coloristic treasure trove; it veers from darkish and subtle to fast and furious in the opening *Animé et très décidé*. The music is becalmed before rising to a dramatic end.

In the ensuing *Assez vif et bien rythmé*, gentle plucking supports a dance for the viola, played by Jinsun Hong. Mason Yu's violin and Alex Cox's cello dance in turn, with more gentle *pizzicati* moving on to a delicate finish.

The *Andantino, doucement espressif*, is the heart of the matter. Second violinist Erica Tursi passes a pensive theme over to Ms. Hong's viola. Then Mr. Yu commences a haunting violin solo over dense, perfumed harmonies. Mr. Cox's cello is heard in a yearning passage; Ms. Hong's viola has another melody, with the other voices commenting. Ms. Tursi's violin gets dreamy. As passion rises, Mr. Yu's violin soars onto silken heights. The music turns wonderfully sensuous.



A deep cello prelude opens the concluding *Très modéré - Très mouvementé*, which soon becomes enlivened. Swerving from lyrical to animated, with a rising rhythmic acceleration, to an exultant ending.

In the Debussy, we have been able to savour the artists of the Omer Quartet as individual voices. Taking the lead, Mason Yu displays astonishing intensity and power whilst at all times maintaining a gorgeous sheen on his tone.

Composer Chris Rogerson (left) charmingly spoke of how humbled he felt to be featured on a program alongside Haydn, Debussy, and Beethoven; Mr. Rogerson described his own *String Quartet No. 1* as "modest." **I found it to be thoroughly engaging and engrossing.**

I hear an awful lot of 'new' (or recent) music, and I have to admit that, while much of it shows astute craftsmanship and is sometimes pleasing in a quirky way, very little

of it leaves a lasting impression or makes me want to hear it again. Mr. Rogerson's string quartet is thus a very pleasing discovery.

The music clocks in at twelve minutes, and left me wishing there had been a couple more movements. Such as Mr. Rogerson has given us, each of the three has a title: **DUEL**, **HYMN**, and **DANCE**; the music does what the titles say.

Slashing motifs and a pulsing cello mark the start of **DUEL**. It's brisk and driven. There's a violin solo with just a hint of jazz; dynamics are very much in play as the swordsmen feint and parry. There's a relentless energy, whether loud or soft: an ever-forward impetus. It ends suddenly.

HYMN is gorgeous...gorgeous, I tell you. The harmonies are achingly beautiful as they bend and shift thru slow modulations. The second violin, cello, and first violin each sing forth over blendings of lustrous colours. The tempo increases somewhat; the violin heads heavenward. Superb playing made it all the more inspiring.

DANCE springs up on a 3-note motif; the energy calms to some poignant harmonies over deep cello. It's over all too soon. It seemed to me that the Rogerson *String Quartet #1* is ready-made to be a ballet. I'm sending news of it on to Claudia Schreier.

Igor Stravinsky described Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge, Op. 133*, as "...an absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary forever..." and thus it seemed this evening: fresh, daring, ahead of its time. Originally conceived as the finale for his *Quartet #13*, the composer was persuaded by his publisher that the music was too off-putting and he traded it out for something more conventional, retaining the *Grosse Fuge* as a stand-alone piece.

The Omer Quartet did a fabulous job with it, relishing all the weirdness and playing like gods and goddesses. The audience was vigorously receptive, calling for two encores. Cellist Alex Cox announced the first - a "very short" Kurtag piece, slow and mysterious, that ended abruptly just as we were starting to savour it. And then a Haydn *Vivace*, full of comfort and joy.

I'll look forward to my next encounter with The Omer Quartet.

~ Oberon

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