

Concert Review: Carpe Diem String Quartet at Weill Recital Hall

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By Elizabeth Glasure

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Carpe Diem String Quartet. Photo Credit: <http://www.carpediemstringquartet.com/>

With enthrallingly flawless execution and miraculous synchronicity, the Carpe Diem String Quartet wowed their New York audience on Saturday night at Carnegie’s Weill Recital Hall. Comprising of Charles Wetherbee and Amy Galuzzo on violin, co-founder Korine Fujiwara on viola, and Carol Ou on cello, the four aptly describe their style as “virtuosity without pomposity.” The experience of the extremely diverse ensemble was an unmatched delicacy of the classical and modern music scene.

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The quartet began their program with an impeccably coordinated version of Schubert’s String Quartet in C Minor, D. 703. The felicitous evening opener well demonstrated the ensemble’s balance efficiency. The following world premiere piece, “Seize the Sun: Fantasy on Icarus,” was the indisputable feature of the evening from composer Jeffrey Nytch.

Beginning with a sustained and anxious pizzicato whispering, the piece developed into a relaxed melancholy emblazoned with the “flying too close to the sun” aphorisms of Icarus’ myth. Nytch describes the composition as “a cautionary tale about hubris and the dangers of not respecting our limitations.” The music then crescendos into a hopeful yearning, followed by the peaceful tranquility of breaking dawn. The audience was quite taken with the piece, and long applauded the in-house composer after the premiere.

Little known Russian composer Sergei Taneyev's String Quartet No. 9 in A Major followed. Carpe Diem is striving to gradually recover all of the composer's string quartets, having released their fifth CD of his works in December 2016. The initial Allegro Moderato was fervently simple, swelling into the ardent dream sequence of the Andante section. The ensemble's apparent affinity for Taneyev's work shone through in their passionate vitality, coming to a fiery forte in the Allegro Giocoso. The piece was proved to be very traditionally Russian, complete with a controlled messy angst throughout the cheerful romp.

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After intermission followed the second world premiere of the evening: Reza Vali's Calligraphy No. 15, "Raak." Vali began composing his "Calligraphy" series in 2000, introducing the traditional Persian sound to the string quartet genus. "Raak" was a dissonant Persian pastorella, a call of dissonant cries followed by a response of lyric agreement. The incommensurability of the piece speaks to the ensemble's immense versatility in performance.

Finally, co-founder Korine Fujiwara's original composition, "Fiddle Suite: Montanta," brought the evening to a reverberatingly warm close. Fujiwara introduced the suite, calling the first three movements "mostly geographical, but occasionally autobiographical." The terrestrial accuracy of the composition was represented in a Devil Went Down to Montana-esque, rambling, classy two-step. Many an audience head bobbed along to the backwoods-gone-mainstream melodies.

The full percussive spectrum of the string musicians was represented in snaps, taps, and pizzicato sections galore. The final two movements were described by Fujiwara as a depiction of "family, things we hold precious, embracing the moment, and celebrating life with music." The result was a cathartic, reverently starry-eyed folk Americana dance.

The Carpe Diem String Quartet is a refreshingly honest testament to the value of composers past and the potential of composers present. With a flair for the romantic and technical expertise to spare, the ensemble is a perfectly structured, dexterously concentrated success. Their soft expressivity clears the way for one and all to appreciate the joys of the string quartet, joys which can easily develop into budding enthusiasm. This ensemble must be held in only the highest and most reverent esteem; their contribution in this current political climate must not go unnoticed.

Running Time: 2 hours and 15 minutes, including one intermission

The Carpe Diem String Quartet performed on Saturday, January 14, 2017 at the Weill Recital Hall in New York, NY. For more information, click [here](#).