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KVT – Parisii Excels at L’Espace

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By Kiem Van Tim

L’Espace came up with world class goods again on Saturday night when they got the Parisii Quartet to stop over in their auditorium as part of Parisii’s Asian tour.

And the L’Espace auditorium is really spot on for intimate recitals! After the concert we walked into the L’Espace foyer and were confronted with a downpour of mini biblical proportions that would have had Noah, his sons and hanger-ons out dodging the thunder and lightning to get the ark floatable. But in the auditorium....nary a sound of the heavens growling, clashing, flashing and emptying as Parisii played divinely.

The quartet founded itself in the eighties with four confreres from music school.

On this tour, the second violinist was replaced with a gorgeous brunette who lived up to the Parisii reputation and also played divinely.

It was a full house and a lengthy recital and as expected the audience fell in with the grandly solemn hymn like slow movement of Haydn’s ‘Rider’ quartet and then responded really enthusiastically to the 2nd from Schumann’s third string quartet and with bravos to the even more unknown and impressionistic tonal movement from Debussy’s only string quartet.

The Debussy was a turning point for quartets and led the way for composers who did away with the strict rules of classical harmony and took to the type of music for which Parisii is noted for and for which it has a strong following...though it also has an impressive recording history of the more well known compositions of the genre.

The recording I’m after is a 2013 re-issue of the first-ever recording of the complete works of Pierre Boulez in Le livre pour quatuor, from Deutsche Grammophon.

Unfortunately for the Quartet, when they came on with the last piece of the night, it was a complete string quartet (Schubert’s ‘Death and the Maiden’) and some in the audience were unaware that they were listening to 4 movements from one particular composition and became a trifle perplexed. Perhaps a verbal explanation in French and Vietnamese would have helped out).

For those in the know the effusive clapping between movements was only a little off putting and the very intense 40 minute piece which is often referred to as the masterpiece of all string quartets was played as divinely as you’d expect Parisii to play, particularly in the circumstances.

The piece takes its name from a song Schubert wrote in which a maiden pleads with death to spare her, to no avail as death persuades her to sleep in his arms. The song is refrained throughout the work.

As much as I'd been hanging out for a more contemporary quartet....say a Phillip Glass which is in the Parisii repertoire, I'd have to be a complete clot headed dolt to disparage their sensitive and emotive interpretation of Death and the Maiden.