
IN PERFORMANCE

CLASSICAL MUSIC

**A Passion for Geometry
(And Jewelry)**

Parisii Quartet
Miller Theater

One clarifying approach to Pierre Boulez's "Book for Quartet" is to examine its inner titles: "3A" and "3B" are indeed at a distance from "Seven Last Words of Christ" or "Fountains at the Villa d'Este." By 1948 fervent spiritual allusions and scenic imagery had (momentarily) lost the upper hand to the kind of tight-lipped geometry the young Mr. Boulez celebrates in these pieces.

The Parisii Quartet brought a good part of a long and difficult work to its concert on Friday night. If there is passion in this music, it is not the confessional kind, more like a devotion to sensory, almost tactile stimulus. One's reaction to the "Book for Quartet" could not be called love. Admiration is the better word, akin to the pleasures felt in fondling excellent jewelry.

Rejections of the past are explicit. The absence of tonality is taken for granted. More interesting is the compacting of melody in long breaths to "phrases" often not more than one or two notes. Silence between small gestures is pronounced and provides much of the momentum. Beauty of sound is an uppermost concern in this unfailingly elegant music. At this stage of his career Mr. Boulez was fully conversant with the string quartet's repertory of devices, among them muting of the most delicate kind, col legno, bowing and a whole variety of plucked-string effects.

The Parisii Quartet is from France and seemed to be exercising its proprietary lease on the "Book for Quartet." There was a good-sized audience present, and at the end it returned to the musicians the same kind of reserved enthusiasm it had been receiving from the stage.

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