

Parisii Quartet: Chamber Music with a French Accent

By Michael Huebner

In the Parisii Quartet, no single player dominates. And they all do.

It's that paradox that makes this ensemble the epitome of what a string quartet should be. Few can claim the level of egalitarianism this Parisian foursome demonstrated Thursday at the Alys Stephens Center, yet retain the transparency that allows each individual musician to stand out.

Even in the thorny harmonic contradictions of Darius Milhaud's String Quartet No. 4, there was unity. The quartet has recorded all of this composer's quartets, so despite the work's ear-bending sounds and uneasy position as the opening work, the Parisii had familiarity on their side. The acerbic playfulness of the opening movement led to the somber sighs of the funeral march and rhythmic force of the finale.

Then came as exquisite a reading of Debussy's String Quartet, Op. 10, as you are likely to hear. Jean-Philippe Martignoni exerted his rich cello sound to its fullest, violist Dominique Lobet following in kind. Second violinist Jean-Michel Berrette completed the deep foundation while first violinist Arnaud Vallin fit snugly into the impeccably nuanced blend. The softly muted strains in the opening movement and precisely executed pizzicato



passages in the second movement were played with authority. The Andantino, a movement of extraordinary beauty, was played as a single sentence, solos by Lobet and Vallin exuding longing and tenderness.

Cesar Franck's Quartet in D major is a tour de force that ranges from near silence to brilliant waves of fullness. Its long arches are slow to unfold, but the Parisii instilled them with intrigue. Broad strokes and imitative passages propelled the opening movement, followed by the intricate weavings and muted colors of the Scherzo. Quick flourishes in the finale set the stage for a kinetic and vibrant close. At 45 minutes long, it requires patient listening, but the rewards are worth the effort.

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Arnaud Vallin, violinist
Jean-Michel Berrette, violinist
Dominique Lobet, violist
Jean-Philippe Martignoni, cellist

☆☆☆☆

Alys Stephens Center
Thursday
Presented by Birmingham Chamber Music Society