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Music review:

Online title: iPalpiti witty, imaginative at Disney Hall

In print title: String theory at its brilliant best



iPalpiti conductor Eduard Schmieder does Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* at Walt Disney Concert Hall.
(Dana Ross Photography / July 28, 2012)

By Richard S. Ginell

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Eduard Schmieder, conductor and orchestra trainer, likes to program transcriptions of works by name-brand composers -- and in the latest annual iPalpiti showcase at Walt Disney Concert Hall on Saturday night, he presented an entire evening of them.

It's not a fashionable idea in this age of relentless pursuit of "authenticity," but that doesn't bother Schmieder. Nor should it, for he put together an imaginative, wide-ranging and, yes, witty combination of these things, played with smooth, expert brilliance by his young string players from around the globe.

To start, there was a transcription of a Handel Passacaglia by Igor Lerman for strings and (over-amplified) harpsichord that cascades onward in lush fashion until, suddenly, the strings dissolve in a dissonant wash a la Alfred Schnittke (no wonder; the transcription was dedicated to him).

The famous J.S. Bach/Stokowski Preludio followed, played by iPalpiti even more beautifully now than a decade ago.

Leading Czech violinist Pavel Sporcl, last seen with iPalpiti in 1999, played the Kreisler/Zandonai version of Tartini's "Devil's Trill" Sonata, and added Saint-Saëns's Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso -- all rendered with polished control and dynamic variety, never forcing his tone.

Schoenberg's own string-orchestra version of his "Verklärte Nacht" was given a broad, scintillating, clearly etched performance that was very faithful to the score's many tempo fluctuations, generating a cool fire that was quite moving.

Finally, having once again affirmed iPalpiti's ability to shine, Schmieder deconstructed it a bit with a little-known Hindemith practical joke, the "Minimax" quartet in string-orchestra garb. "Minimax" is a parody of military band music, with deliberate wrong notes, funny harmonics and wild, dynamic contrasts. The humor can be heavy in a hearty Germanic way, yet Schmieder's deadpan underlining of certain points made for a performance of delightfully silly fun.

Three encores wrapped it all up -- Böhm's Perpetuum Mobile, Bach's Badinerie and MacDowell's "To a Wild Rose."