

iPalpiti Soloists Play Rare Chamber Music at UCLA

BY RICHARD S. GINELL , July 19, 2019



iPalpiti Soloists: L-R: Semyon Promoe and Samuel Nebyu, violins; Midori Maruyama and Agnieszka Podlucka, violas; Sevak Avanesyan and Egor Antonenko, cellos | *Credit: Bill Dean*

One long-running summer music festival collided with another in a noontime concert at UCLA July 16. The **Festival of International Laureates** — which is iPalpiti Artists International’s annual Southern California showcase for 25 to 30 young musicians — is in its 22nd season. The Henry J. Bruman Summer Chamber Music Festival — which presents free chamber music concerts on the UCLA campus — has been around for 31 years, largely under the radar.

The two festivals came together in the historic Rotunda on the second floor of the Powell Library directly across the quad from Royce Hall, where the music managed to overcome the subdued hubbub of voices from the adjacent main reading room. The airy Rotunda has acoustics that you might call “problematic,” but that didn’t deter a group of expert iPalpiti string players from carrying out on one of the organization’s most admirable missions — resurrecting little-known, audience-friendly music that other groups don’t bother looking for.

For example: Did you know that Rimsky-Korsakov wrote a string sextet? Neither did I until this concert — and the piece is a gem that has been obscured by Rimsky-Korsakov's reputation as a brilliant orchestrator and opera composer. It comes in an unconventional package of five movements — four of which have fast tempos, each of which is loaded with good tunes and high-quality craftsmanship that was the result of a crash self-course on theory and counterpoint that Rimsky-Korsakov undertook in his late 20s.

If there is a single high point, it would be the third movement Scherzo, marked *Vivace alla saltarello*, a wonderfully racing, skittering thing that ought to have achieved great popularity. The closest relative for this sextet that I can think of is Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*, which would make a perfect coupling on a CD (and did via the Vienna String Sextet on one of the piece's bare handful of recordings).

A polyglot sextet consisting of violinists Samuel Nebyu and Semyon Promoe, violists Midori Maruyama and Agnieszka Podlucka, and cellists Egor Antonenko and Sevak Avanesyan seemed to relish every bar of the sextet, revving up the scherzos with a rumbling energy and abandon, digging deeply into the Slavic Romantic soul in the lone slow movement. They had to fight the room in order to do so, for the Powell Rotunda has a long, long reverberation time — long enough so that Rimsky-Korsakov's textures were smudged to the point where you wondered how the players managed to stay together.



iPalpiti Soloists | Credit: Bill Dean

Prior to the Rimsky-Korsakov sextet, Nebyu and Podlucka unearthed another winner, Bohuslav Martinu's Three Madrigals for Violin and Viola, really a duo sonata consisting of two frisky, attractive fast movements surrounding a fluttering Andante central movement. As in the sextet, these players performed with sharp, rhythmic attacks that were definitely needed under these acoustical conditions. The music seemed like a beautiful painting that had been left out in the rain for a short time, enough to produce runny colors but not enough to destroy the essence of the piece.



Friedrich Hermann

While Rimsky-Korsakov and Martinu are at least known quantities — Rimsky-Korsakov more than Martinu — the third composer on the program would draw a blank from all but the most dedicated string players and specialists in German music. Violinists Nebyu, Azer Damirov, and Lorenzo Mazzamuto offered up a pair of Capriccios for three violins by one Friedrich Hermann — a German composer/violinist/editor/teacher who lived from 1828 to 1907 — full of tuneful trillings and twirlings with a Mendelssohnian lightness and energy.

Right here when he was teaching at UCLA, Arnold Schoenberg said that there is plenty of good music yet to be written in C major. But might we turn the phrase around to say that there is plenty of good music that *has* been written in C major — or in these cases, G major and D minor or whatever — that we don't know about.

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