

Georgian Music Review – Penderecki String Quartet and Pianist Stéphane Lemelin - Sunday April 22nd, 2018 - 2:30 p.m.



Submitted by Alyssa Wright

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Penderecki String Quartet with Pianist Stéphane Lemelin, April 22

Georgian Music's final concert of the 2017-18 season took place on a glorious Sunday afternoon which could have easily affected audience turnout, but the Penderecki String Quartet's draw was stronger than that of the new-found sunshine, and Grace United Church was full. As Bruce Owen explained at intermission, not only is the Penderecki considered one of the finest quartets of their generation, they have been good and generous friends of Barrie Concerts, and that loyalty seems to extend in both directions.

The program began with a work many string quartets use as an encore: Hugo Wolf's "Italian Serenade" – a fun and lively piece with much bounce and rhythmic complexity. The quartet jumped right into the opening without so much as a noticeable cue, such is the subtle communication between these four. Yet watching the playful repartee between them as the piece progressed was a treat, especially that between violinists Jeremy Bell and Jerzy Kaplanek.

Edvard Grieg's Quartet in G minor, Op.27, is a highly expressive work that sounds almost orchestral in places. It is a favourite of mine, and it was quite apparent that the Penderecki Quartet relished performing it as well. From the unison statement of the opening theme into the fire of the Allegro first movement, the mournful viola solo by Christine Vlajk, and the gorgeous cello "soliloquy" hauntingly played by Katie Schlaikjer, the perfection of the first movement was marred only by the jangling ring of an audience member's cell phone as the final notes faded. Alas. All was soon forgotten, though, as the quartet began the Romanze – a movement filled with rich melodies traded between the lower strings, and a light, delicate waltz-like theme. The beautiful harmonic ending was, fortunately, unmarred by errant technology. The quartet evidently revelled romping through the final two movements, deftly trading the intricate, grace-note infused theme of the Intermezzo amongst the players, and bringing out the jovial vigour of the Finale.

The second half of the concert saw pianist Stéphane Lemelin join the quartet for Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari's Piano Quintet, Op.6, and the two violinists switching roles with Kaplanek taking first chair. This work was new to me, and I wasn't at all certain what to expect – it was included in the program at Owen's request, and was new to the Quartet as well. Beautiful solo lines for the lower strings in the Tranquillo and Canzone movements, playful interplay between the strings and piano in the Capriccio, and the enthusiastic verve of the Finale, all delivered with the perfect mix of passion and playfulness. These five instrumentalists were obviously enjoying delivering this performance as much as we enjoyed listening to it.