



aturday, February 15, 2020

Youth is Served in Long Beach



The Viano Quartet: l-r Tate Zawadiuk, Aiden Kane, Lucy Wang, Hao Zhou.

Viano Quartet with Micah Yui, Music Guild Los Angeles, Cal State Long Beach
JIM RUGGIRELLO

The Viano Quartet and pianist Micah Yui played a very mainstream program as part of the Music Guild Los Angeles chamber music series the other night at Daniel Recital Hall on the campus of Cal State Long Beach. All three pieces were as standard as standard can be.

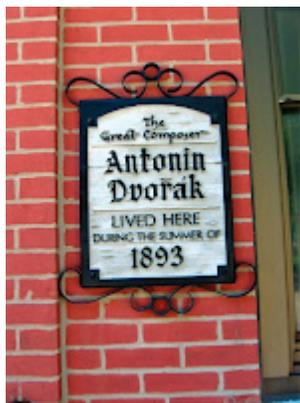
Eugene Golden, the Guild's executive and artistic director, has been known to program more innovative fare of late, but this was not that; warhorses by Dvořák, Beethoven, and Schumann may not excite new music aficionados, but they are right up his conservative audience's alley. (Speaking of Golden, who usually gives a chatty introduction to these concerts, he was not present. He suffered a bad fall the night before, and will reportedly be okay. In the event, Yui, a teacher at the Colburn School, gave the welcoming remarks.)



Micah Yui.

And speaking of the Colburn School, that's where the members of the quartet graduated from, and where they are currently in residence.

About the quartet's unusual name, I can do no better than to quote from the concert program: The name "Viano" was created to describe the four individual instruments in a string quartet interacting as one. Each of the four instruments begins with the letter "V," and like a piano, all four string instruments together play both harmony and melody, creating a unified instrument called the "Viano." So there.



Commemorative plaque at Bily Clocks Museum, Spillville, Iowa.

This is a young group, even if the music wasn't, and it showed. The four gave Antonín Dvořák's (1841-1904) Quartet in F, Op. 96, "American" (written in 1893 during the composer's sojourn in Spillville, Iowa), which opened the program, a performance that exuded youthful exuberance, and that's not necessarily a good thing. The piece, which a recent survey named as the most popular chamber music composition of all time, is a sunny, mellow creation, chock full of Dvořák's characteristic melodies and rhythms.

There was very little mellowness in the Vianos' interpretation of this great work. This was an aggressive, in-your-face performance, very confident and very loud. First violinist Lucy Wang has a steely, incisive tone; second Hao Zhou's sound is also incisive but warmer. Viola Aiden Kane and cellist Tate Zawadiuk equal them for volume and strength; in that respect the quartet is evenly matched.

Robust muscularity, typical of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) in his middle period, suited the group's character better. In Op. 59, No. 3 in C, one of those set dedicated to and named after Count Rasumovsky (1806), Zhou and Wang switched chairs, something you don't see that often, and it seemed to help the overall effect. There was more shading, subtlety, and varied dynamics, the funeral march was appropriately misterioso, the minuet appropriately graceful. Still, the finale went like the wind; it was exhilarating, and they pulled it off, but I'm not sure it was Beethoven.



Count Andrey Rasumovsky.



Robert and Clara Schumann.

Things came together in the Piano Quintet in E-flat, Op. 44 (1842) by Robert Schumann (1810-1856). Yui is a strong player who plays with the lid all the way up, and I've heard her often on this series, where she has been known to overwhelm other quartets, in this and other pieces. In the Viano she has finally met her match in terms of bold expression and sheer volume, and the group's performance of this expansive, extroverted work was the most successful of the evening. Zhou again sat first chair.

The Viano has won numerous competitions and awards, and they are just getting started. This was their first appearance on the Music Guild series, and one hopes future programs are a tad more adventurous. Technically, they are individually and collectively superb, and I expect within 10 years they will be at the top of their profession. And maybe playing with a little more, dare we say, maturity.

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Viano Quartet, Music Guild Los Angeles, Gerard R. Daniel Recital Hall, Cal State Long Beach, Tuesday, February 11, 8:00 p.m.

