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Clarinetist Stoltzman & the Borromeo String Quartet by Lyn Bronson



Any opportunity to hear clarinetist Richard Stoltzman is an experience not to be forgotten, and he was in top form last night at Sunset Center in his appearance with the Borromeo String Quartet.

The members of the quartet, violinists Nicholas Kitchen and Kristopher Tong, violist Mai Motobuchi and cellist Yessun Kim, weren't too bad either, and **they combined to give us an evening of chamber music we are not likely to forget.**

CMMB President Amy Anderson in welcoming the audience commented that we were observing a "first" in this concert, for the musicians had forsaken use of the printed music. Instead, on stage were five laptop computers on stands, which would individually display the entire score for each piece. As an added bonus, each musician had a foot switch that permitted them to advance the pages without using their hands. How high tech can you get? I must admit that I didn't see this technical innovation coming, and I had to ask myself, what next? Will we someday see the printed score projected over the stage on a screen, or maybe even transmitted by WIFI so that members of the audience can sit during the performance and observe the score on their own individual laptops? If you have seen photos of audiences at a 3-D movie showing hundreds of spooky-looking people wearing nerdy 3-D glasses, imagine how it might appear to performers on stage looking out into the audience and seeing hundreds of people's faces faintly illuminated by the ghostly bluish glow from laptop computer screens. Sigh! I hope we don't come to that.

Anyway, coming back to the real world, **clarinetist Stoltzman has a truly gorgeous sound, and he uses it totally naturally and musically — nothing is ever done for effect.** All wind players practice long tones on their instruments — sustained long notes from the softest to the loudest as a way of communing with and controlling their instrument. However, rarely do musicians give us an opportunity to hear them doing this in public. There are only two works I know of that display it so blatantly. One is a clarinet passage in Messiaen's "Quartet for the

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End of Time” and the other we heard last night in the *Arioso* of Hindemith’s Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet, Op. 30. Stoltzman played a lovely sounding single note, seemingly coming from nowhere, which grew louder and more beautiful with every passing moment. Incidentally, I have to also mention in the same movement a great solo by violinist Nicholas Kitchen. Another great moment in the Hindemith was **Stoltzman’s solo against pizzicato strings in the second movement that was so beautifully shaped and controlled it was some of the most beautiful clarinet playing I have ever heard.**

The Schuman Quartet in A Minor, Op. 41, No. 1, is a work I had never heard before, and it turned out to be a pleasing work that received a wonderfully solid performance. **The ensemble was fabulous, and although the individual players took considerable risks in the faster movements, the playing was always incredibly precise.**

It was, however, the final work that turned out to be the greatest performance of the evening — the Mozart Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K.581, “Stadler’s Quintet.” **This is a magical work that received a magical performance on this occasion. Stoltzman’s beautiful playing in the first movement was spectacular. The uncanny thing is that his playing never drew undue attention to itself as a show of virtuosity, but rather enveloped us like a great vocal solo spinning along with the other instruments. It would be difficult to imagine a better performance than this.**

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