



from
Young Concert Artists, Inc.

KEVIN PUTS, *Composer*

The Mercury News

San Jose, California

Miró delivers new work with precision, sympathy

By Richard Scheinin
October 15, 2007

The Miró Quartet has a way of going inside music, exposing its architecture, so that a listener can "see" the nuts and bolts and the whole sweep of it. If that sounds like a clinical approach, it's not.

The group's playing is not only super-clear, but also vital, simmering with emotion.

The quartet's Saturday concert at Le Petit Trianon, where it opened the San Jose Chamber Music Society's 22nd season, was remarkable. Mozart's "Hoffmeister" Quartet started it: a place of deep solace. Beethoven's first "Razumovsky" Quartet ended it: a teeming world of melody and countermelody, emotion and counter-emotion.

In between, there was a brand-new piece by New York-based composer Kevin Puts, commissioned by Chamber Music Monterey Bay for the Miró. Titled "Credo," it evokes Puts' belief in the essential goodness of America - or Americans, maybe. It moves from long-lined tranquillity to a bracing grandeur and fades into the sort of Quaker silence that's generally been forgotten in a multimedia, war-torn world.

It's a touching and beautiful piece and was beautifully played by the Miró, which had given "Credo" its world premiere only the night before in Carmel.

Puts was on hand Saturday, adding a lot to the event. In a pre-concert conversation with San Jose State University musicologist William R. Meredith, he talked about the role of music: Should it offer peace and sanctuary to a listener, à la Mozart, or surprise and challenge a listener without "completely throwing [him or her] off the train," à la Beethoven?

While identifying with Beethoven, Puts said, he loves Mozart best, and "Credo" made that clear. It dips into a 20th-century vocabulary - glassy textures, with occasional clashing elements - but feels like a sanctuary, ruled by balance and beauty, two key elements in Mozart. It also bears a relationship to the pastoral music of Aaron Copland but, unlike many recent pieces in that genre, avoids sugary Americana sentiment.

Its narrative gets spun through three vignettes. One evokes Puts' visit with his fiancée, a violinist, to a small-town violin shop in upstate New York; another, his jogging along Pittsburgh's Monongahela River, overshadowed by an awesome maze of bridges and highways; a third, his looking out the window of his Manhattan apartment and seeing, in an apartment across the street, a mother teaching her child to dance.

The Miró threaded through this musical story with its usual attention to technical detail and emotional nuance. Some highlights: a soft backdrop-chorale for second violin, cello and viola while the first violin (Daniel Ching) tries out bits of Bach and Sibelius in the violin shop; the bracing bridge-like chords of the Monongahela infrastructure movement, above the river's rushing (and fast-fiddled) waters; and the tender sense of time suspended in the dance movement, with a glowing song for cello (Joshua Gindele) over soft drones.

Next there's a brief return to the Monongahela and then the final movement, which Puts described as a "meditation on the theme of hope." It resembles a slow-turning hymn, with a handful of repeating, almost pop-inflected chords, drifting away.