



Posted on Sun, Mar. 28, 2010

## Kimmel concert: Stimulating, joyful

By David Patrick Stearns, Inquirer Classical Music Critic

It grooves, moves and looks like an indie rock group, but Brooklyn Rider is indeed a string quartet, one easily embraced by anybody with a serious and not-all-that-adventurous pair of ears at the latest installment of the Kimmel Center's Fresh Ink series.

The Saturday concert featured Brooklyn Rider with the string/percussion quartet 2 Foot Yard in the kind of genre-bending music that once inspired trepidation from classical audiences, not for fear of leaving comfort zones, but for encountering a marketing pose rather than genuine creativity.

The program was a case of 21st century musicians simply being well-rounded citizens of a musical world in which Latin and Persian folk cultures, for example, aren't confined to national borders, and French Impressionists are as much a part of our world as the era that spawned them.

Besides being extremely stimulating, the concert was also full of a kind of unfiltered joy that's less frequent at the Perelman Theater than one would think. Even the most cultivated genre-bending groups such as Kronos Quartet and the Silk Road Ensemble deliver fascinating demonstrations of musical fusion without leaving you wanting more. My reaction on Saturday wasn't "Isn't this interesting?" but "Isn't this fun?"

Brooklyn Rider played a sampling of its own repertoire, including Brooklesca and Achille's Heel, two substantial pieces by the group's second violinist, Colin Jacobsen – both full of urban propulsion, all the more infectious for the rhythmic glitches often thrown in, suggesting Klezmer one second, country fiddling the next, though at warp speed.

Improvisational breeziness was balanced by a good sense of overall musical planning. 2 Foot Yard (whose name refers to the size of back yards) is more of a pop band – its two female string players also sing – with group-authored music that's unafraid to only utilize the bare outlines of typical song form amid extended instrumental and poetic interludes.

The two groups collaborated, for the concert's second half, on the joint-composed A Blue Hat Washed Up On Shore . . . , a multi-movement suite that began and ended with a scratchy, 1920s recording of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. In between, the music was minimalist based – at times the side of minimalism that points back to Debussy's decisive break with traditional goal-based harmony. One of the violinists played a deeply lyrical solo that felt like something from Debussy's more conservative contemporary, Gabriel Fauré.

Poetic point of references for any given movement included Einsteinesque statements about the nature of space and time, though presented in a way that never felt opaque and was always inviting. The message wasn't, "See how cool we are," but "Welcome to our world."