November 6, 2014

PUBLIQuartet Mixes Jazz and Classical at Subculture

By Robert Leeper

The PUBLIQuartet is a group of young string players who bring both technical mastery and freewheeling joy to their music playing. On Monday evening at Subculture, they played folk-themed classical works from the early 20th century as well as the jazz works that influenced them, in an improvisatory mashup of the best of both styles.

Each work on the program seemed to be a piece of a puzzle that, when put together, created a compelling musical story. Stravinsky’s *Three Pieces* (1918) saw a pivot from the more provocative work of his early career to a more subtle style—one in which he and his peers in the jazz world engaged in a free exchange of ideas.

Each movement of the work is given a descriptive name: "Dance", based on the repetition of a Russian folk melody; "Eccentric", a reference to the clown Little Tick; and "Canticle", a gorgeous melody that the group imbued with a magnetic momentum and energy.

Though not next to each other in the program, the emotional pair for *Three Pieces* was *Epistrophe*, an improvisation based on Thelonious Monk's standard *Epistrophy* (1942). When played in such close succession to *Three Pieces*, the similarity to the lurching of Stravinsky’s Little Tick was remarkable.

Greg Kallor’s *Found*, a witheringly beautiful ode to the moments of solitude found in the city that never sleeps, sat comfortably after Debussy’s *String Quartet in G minor*. The PUBLIQuartet’s ravishing swells in Debussy’s slow third movement presaged the voluptuous sound of Kallor’s closed piano voicings and rich chordal style.

Further local color came in the form of Villa-Lobos’s *Bachiana Brasileiras No.5*, arranged by PUBLIQuartet violinist Jannina Norpoth. The doubling of the violin and viola in place of the wordless soprano part gave a full-bodied, textured sound and an easy swing to the work.

The evening closed with another improvisation: *A Bird in Paris*, this time mixing Charlie Parker and Debussy, with quotes from *The Girl With Flaxen Hair*, *Blues for Alice*, and *April in Paris*. It was an appropriately eclectic work to crown an evening of innovative music making without any condescension or compromise.