

Quatuor Ebène Biography

August 2013

Pierre Colombet
Violin

Gabriel Le Magadure
Violin

Mathieu Herzog
Viola

Raphaël Merlin
Violoncello

<http://www.quatuorebene.com/>

“A string quartet that can easily morph into a jazz band,” praised The New York Times’ Alan Kozinn following a March 2009 performance featuring the Quatuor Ebène.

Mesmerized, Mr. Kozinn describes how the four musicians first performed Haydn and Debussy before performing their own arrangement of the music from the movie “Pulp Fiction”, improvising to Chick Corea’s “Spain”, and finally closing with an encore in which the quartet unveils the vocal talents of an excellent a capella quartet.

There is no doubt: These four French musicians have class and are perhaps the most creative ensemble on the international chamber music scene today. No other quartet moves with such ease and enthusiasm between different styles.

Rather unusual in today’s world of chamber music, the Quatuor Ebène’s stylistic acrobatics may at first meet defiant ears. Defiant, perhaps, because of the general misuse of the term “crossover”, which so often serves to cover mediocrity and redundancy. And yet, with the Ebènes, whenever they create a new work, it is always with taste and integrity.

Nevertheless, the quartet’s traditional repertoire does not suffer in any way from its love of Jazz. On the contrary, the Ebènes’ tendency to delve into the “other side” of music inspires their work in untangling and giving new life to classical works.

There is, in French ensemble music today, a certain élan, which suits modern chamber music particularly well. This new generation of French musicians, their hearts full of passion for tradition, has been captivating audiences with great success, converting listeners into avid fans of the chamber music genre. The performances are so convincing, the stage presence so charismatic, that one cannot escape the spellbinding magic of these masterpieces.

The Quatuor Ebène has studied extensively with the Ysaye Quartet in Paris as well as with the eminent Gábor Takács, Eberhard Feltz et György Kurtág. Since its dramatic 2004 triumph at the prestigious ARD international competition in Munich, where the quartet was also awarded five

additional special prizes, the Ebènes have gone on to win the Forberg-Schneider Foundation's Belmont Prize in 2005. It has since remained close to the foundation, which has very generously arranged to have the quartet outfitted with several unique Italian instruments, on loan to the quartet members from private owners.

From "promising young ensemble", the Quatuor Ebène has grown to become one of today's foremost quartets on the international scene.

2009 marked the beginning of an especially fruitful collaboration with the Virgin Classics label. The quartet's Debussy, Ravel and Fauré recording was awarded several prizes, including "Chamber Music Record of the Year" by ECHO-Klassik, the fff Télérama award, the "choc" Monde de la Musique award, and most notably "Recording of the Year" by the prestigious magazine Gramophone. There followed a Brahms CD with the pianist Akiko Yamamoto, which demonstrated once again how at ease the quartet performs in a range of styles.

A Jazz and World Music album, entitled Fiction, was released in Fall 2010. The Ebènes received an Echo Award and nearly hit the top of the charts. At the beginning of 2011/2012 season Virgin Classics released a live DVD of Fiction, recorded at Folies Bergère in Paris. This was followed by a CD with Mozart's string quartets K421 and K465 and Divertimento K13, as well as a CD box with the chamber music of Fauré, recorded with the quartet's partners. The quartet received, for both recordings, an Echo Award in 2012. "Felix & Fanny" – featuring Felix Mendelssohn's string quartets Op. 13 and 80, as well as the only string quartet composed by his sister Fanny – was released in the beginning of 2013.

(Antony Almeida)

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