

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Marathon performance of Bartok's string quartets

November 13, 2012|By David Patrick Stearns,

Inquirer Music Critic

Certain music never becomes easy. In fact, the formidability of Bela Bartok's six string quartets increases over time, especially when heard in the marathon concert by the Borromeo String Quartet Sunday at the Curtis Institute.

Though not the first Bartok marathon in my experience, it was the most intense, performed at a high standard that brought you so deeply into the music's inner workings that you wondered if your brain could take it all in.

Spanning the period from 1908 when the composer was 27 to the eve of World War II in 1939, Bartok's quartets ask to be performed in a single concert not just because they represent one of the highest peaks in 20th-century music, but because there's an easily traceable progression.

The first quartet shows the composer emerging from the received language of Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy with a more gruff musical voice marked by frenetic, barbaric bachannals. That and other tropes are transformed in an ever more personal manner in each piece, reaching an apex of strangeness with String Quartet No. 5 with peasant songs that somehow feel both woozy and modern.

The String Quartet No. 6 stands apart: Each movement begins with the same motif (like Brahms' Symphony No. 2), though Bartok's version of it feels like a repeated confrontation with inevitable, profound tragedy. Not only was Bartok forced to leave Hungary (whose folk music was his creative foundation) but he did so believing (erroneously) that he'd never again compose after emigrating to the United States. No harmonic resolution anywhere is so apprehensively eloquent as the end of the sixth.

Compared to the Emerson Quartet's famous Bartok marathons at Carnegie Hall in the 1990s (one of which I attended), Borromeo's at Field Concert Hall had musicians, music, and audience contained in a smaller room that, over the three-hour-plus concert, became laudably claustrophobic: The performances never coasted or let you coast.

While the 1990s version of the Emerson Quartet used vibrato so unceasingly as to form a safety curtain between your ears and the music's intensity, the Borromeo Quartet is much more judicious about such matters, giving performances with more nuanced contrasts of light and shade, as well as more open windows that your ear can't help but enter. The music's mystery, violence, and sorrow become absolutely inescapable.

The physical demands of the marathon - sequencing two quartets at a time separated by two intermissions - meant that the second quartet in each part had moments when the Borromeo players didn't achieve what they were after. That's going to happen under such circumstances, and it made you appreciate the magnitude of the undertaking and the numerous transcendent moments.

Besides enjoying Borromeo's blended sheen of sound (similar to the now-defunct Quartet Italiano), I loved the lushness of the cello and viola playing in the first quartet's opening movement, the terrifying virtuosity of the fourth quartet's scherzo, and the haunting, "night music" adagio of the fifth quartet.

Might Borromeo/Bartok recordings be in the offing?

The New York Times

Arts & Leisure

Bytes and Beethoven



Erik Jacobs for The New York Times

From left, Nicholas Kitchen and Yeesun Kim practice with the Borromeo String Quartet rehearsal at the New England Conservatory. [More Photos »](#)

By DANIEL J. WAKIN

WITH a slight blue glow bathing their faces, the four musicians tapped their feet. It was not to keep time but to send pages of music flying by electronically on their stands.

The [Borromeo String Quartet](#) was rehearsing Beethoven's Quartet in C (Op. 59, No. 3) last week. But instead of reading parts perched on music stands, they followed Beethoven's notes, in his own handwriting, from the screens of MacBooks. A projector attached to a laptop beamed the manuscript onto a screen behind them.

"It's an incredible experience, watching the handwriting of Beethoven as it passes by you," said [Nicholas Kitchen](#), the group's first violinist.

The digital tide washing over society is lapping at the shores of classical music. The Borromeo players have embraced it in their daily musical lives like no other major chamber music group.

They record nearly all of their concerts. They have forsaken paper musical parts in favor of MacBooks nestled on special music stands, paging forward and back with foot pedals. They have replaced old-fashioned tuning devices and metronomes with programs on their laptops.

The Borromeo provides an example of how technology is shaping the production and creation of classical music, a bastion of

traditional acoustic sound and repository of centuries-old masterpieces. Operas and concerts are being projected live in movie theaters; music has been written for cellphone ringers and laptops; concert audiences are seeing more and more multimedia presentations; orchestras use text messages to stay in touch with audiences; long-distance musical instruction through high speed Internet2 is common; YouTube videos are used for auditions. Many orchestras now present programs with sophisticated, high-definition video images accompanying the music.

With the Borromeo the contrast is all the more striking. A string quartet is the ultimate in musical refinement, four exquisitely blending instruments capable of infinite nuance — two violins, viola and cello that have essentially been unchanged for more than 400 years. Absorbing the technology did not come easily for these players. Longstanding professional string quartets are delicate organisms, in which egos must be balanced, personalities meshed and artistic compromises reached. The push for blanket recording and laptop stands caused tensions. Several members were slow to embrace the practices. At least one felt pressured to do so. But now, they said, the methods have become second nature, merely handmaidens in service to basic music making.

The Borromeo began selling its live concert recordings in an October 2003 performance at the Tenri Cultural Center in Manhattan, where it was scheduled to return on Friday. Also on Friday the quartet was to open a homemade Web store, livingarchive.org, to sell its performances online, as downloads or in hard copy. The Tenri program is to include the [Beethoven](#) quartet; the Canzona movement from Gunther Schuller's Quartet No. 3; the premiere of a quartet by Mohammed Fairouz, "Chorale Fantasy"; and a [version of Bach's Passacaglia](#) and Fugue (BWV 582) modified for electric string quartet by Mr. Kitchen.

The Borromeo had its origins in the late 1980s at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where Mr. Kitchen; Yeesun Kim, the cellist; and the other two original members were students. Mr. Kitchen and Ms. Kim met there at 16, began playing music together and within a year became a couple. (They are now married and have a 7-year-old son who often travels with them.) On leaving Curtis the quartet moved to the New England Conservatory of Music to study as a group for an artist's diploma. The other two current members are the violist Mai Motobuchi and the second violinist Kristopher Tong.

They took their name from the Borromean Islands in Lake Maggiore in Italy, near where they played their first concerts. Accolades followed. They joined the New England Conservatory faculty, won a Young Concert Artists Award in 1991 and a Cleveland Quartet Award in 1998, played as part of the [Chamber Music Society](#) Two of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and received an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2007. They have grown into a much respected ensemble.

In 2002 Mr. Kitchen, who talks with the meticulousness of a born techie, began preserving every performance he could, slowly educating himself about microphones, digital recorders and video cameras. (He does not record at halls with particularly high fees, like Carnegie and Alice Tully.)

"I realized it was such a pity for so many of them not to be recorded," he said.

Part of the motivation, quartet members said, is the powerful urge to grab onto and preserve those fleeting moments of great performances before a live audience. "For audience members it means a lot to have that memory of what they enjoyed so much," Ms. Kim said.

By now the quartet has more than 800 concerts in its archive. "I have a mountain of hard drives," Mr. Kitchen said. They are piled in an extra apartment the couple

maintain in their condominium complex here in Jamaica Plain. Mr. Kitchen lugs around a 40-pound backpack of equipment for each performance. It takes about an hour to set up for a concert.

In the early years quartet members divided the labor of taking and shipping orders. The work, they said, became overwhelming, and they decided to sell selected performances through the Web site.

But that was not the only reason for cutting back. At least one member — Ms. Motobuchi — began feeling that the warts-and-all approach of total access was a bad idea. “Stupid mistakes do happen,” Ms. Motobuchi said. The quartet decided to hold back some concerts “for the sake of our pride.”

The quartet also uses recordings to teach and to prepare for concerts. Musicians have listened to themselves since recording became possible, but the Borromeo players take it to an extreme. Before every concert they run through a program and immediately listen to it, “with the rule that nobody should talk while they’re listening,” just like an audience member, Mr. Kitchen said.

“Along the way you notice hundreds and hundreds of details that you want to fix,” he added. “Then next time you play it, it’s transformed.”

The quartet’s other pioneering work lies in its use of laptops as music readers. The technology has been around for a while. Several pianists, including Christopher O’Riley, the host of the public radio program “From the Top,” are regular practitioners. But the Borromeo is a rare ensemble that has adopted the laptop stands.

Members of other prominent quartets expressed admiration for the Borromeo’s method but had no immediate plans to follow in their footsteps.

“I don’t see us changing,” Eugene Drucker, a

violinist of the [Emerson String Quartet](#), said. But he called the Borromeo members pioneers. “I know they’re not the type of people to get swept up in the technology and forget to make music,” he added. “Probably more and more groups will be doing this as we go along.”

At the Beethoven rehearsal, in Pierce Hall at the New England Conservatory, the discussion was traditional. Mr. Tong questioned the color of sound in a quiet section after a loud passage. Mr. Kitchen suggested a more even-sounding series of bow strokes. Ms. Kim, who often plays with the half-smile of someone enjoying a subtle joke, worried about the others’ covering a low-voiced cello passage.

The Borromeo permitted this amateur-clarinet-playing journalist to try a test run on the laptop. A reading of the first movement of [Mozart’s](#) Clarinet Quintet was unnerving. One foot tap came too late, causing a page turn delay. An aging eye, already squinting at the tiny notes, sometimes had trouble finding its place. Watching the score and listening to the quartet’s beautiful playing during rests proved distracting enough to lead to a late entrance. Marking the part with the Acrobat tool was cumbersome. All these difficulties, the musicians said, are quickly overcome.

For the Borromeo the use of laptops grew out of a nontechnological impulse. Mr. Kitchen decided he wanted to read his music from a full score — all four lines of the quartet together — rather than from his individual part. That requires many more page turns and makes the use of printed scores impractical.

So, inspired by the example of a pianist friend, Mr. Kitchen scanned scores into his laptop, which he placed on a portable stand that came with a foot pedal attachable through a USB (Footime, about \$80). He started using the system for rehearsing, and one day in December 2007, for the performance of an unfamiliar piece, his

colleagues suggested he take it onstage.

Now the members obtain scores from Web sites offering free editions, like imslp.org, PDF files provided by composers who write music with programs like Sibelius, and their own scanning. They bought advanced versions of Adobe Acrobat that allow annotations.

The quartet, fearful of battery failure, plugs the computers into power sources, covering the wires with a patterned Thai blanket. The players also carry hard copies of their parts as backup but say they have not experienced a computer crash yet. They use 15- or 17-inch MacBook Pros. The setup often draws curious inquiries from audience members new to the Borromeo.

Having the whole score in front of them is an immense help in playing new works. Complicated passages are immediately comprehensible. There are no long discussions in rehearsal that start, "What do you have there?"

Seeing the score as they play also deepens understanding of composers' intentions. "The parts are our convenience," Ms. Motobuchi said. The score "is exactly the direct picture they had in their mind."

And lighting is never a problem.

Mr. Kitchen, 44, the first to adopt the laptop system, kept pushing for it. "We had arguments and aggravated conversations about the issue," said Ms. Kim, 43, who had little hesitation. Ms. Motobuchi, 35, said she took about six months to get used to it.

Mr. Tong — at 29, the youngest and newest member of the group — resisted the most. He still sounds not completely happy with the situation.

Seeing the music of his colleagues on the page can detract from the magic of chamber-music-making, of communicating through hearing, he said. "When first learning a piece," Mr. Tong said, "it's a constant battle to open up the ears. For a long time I felt that the more I was seeing, the less I was hearing."

Mr. Tong held out, at least in more traditional repertory, until early last season. "I definitely felt like I was being pushed in a direction," he said, "which I resented." But in the tradition of healthy quartets, the members hashed out their differences during a long rehearsal. Mr. Tong came aboard and, he said, now sees the merits.

"Reading off the laptops," he added, "that was not part of the contract, but I've come around. I actually have had the experience of feeling much freer, because you are able to take a leap of faith and not gum up the works."

Mr. Kitchen acknowledged that playing from traditional parts had its advantages. "Your ears are forced to feel the other parts without seeing them," he said. "That's also something that we don't want to lose sight of."

At the same time, he added, "as a group we decided that that sense of confidence, of kind of being empowered by this richer information, was something that made our group perform better."

Music

Computers and the Classics: **The Borromeo String Quartet performs in the Music in Deerfield series.**

By Jason Victor Serinus



They've built their reputation in part on their novel use of electronics. In place of the customary music stand, the Borromeo String Quartet relies upon the screens of their Macbook Pros, whose views are changed using foot pedals. Is it any wonder they were the first classical quartet to perform in Boston's Apple Store?

Electronics were not always a distinguishing feature of the quartet's performances. When four students at Philadelphia's Curtis School of Music founded the quartet in 1989, and joined the faculty at the New England Conservatory a few years later, they built their reputation on musicianship alone. You don't receive both the Lincoln Center Martin E. Segal Award and an Avery Fisher Career Grant, let alone manage to play over a hundred concerts a year on three continents, simply by navigating your desktop faster than Jascha Heifetz could zip through Paganini. But the electronics angle certainly enhances their profile.

Perhaps the Borromeo's embrace of computer technology, which includes producing and editing recordings and videos of its concerts, was inevitable. The quartet's electronics wizard, co-founder and first violinist Nicholas Kitchen, grew up helping his mathematics professor father maintain the tracker action organ he played at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in

Durham, North Carolina. Given the young Kitchen's familial familiarity with math, music and foot pedals, it's no wonder he ended up championing an elaborate foot pedal system that uses as many as three hundred and twenty processing pedals to create a host of effects.

Some of the quartet's electronics savvy may come into play this month when they perform in the superb Music in Deerfield series. The middle piece on the program, Steve Reich's modern classic *Different Trains*, utilizes an elaborate pre-recorded soundtrack based on the multiple resonances trains hold for the composer.

"During WWII, Reich's parents were divorced, with one on either coast," Kitchen explained by phone. "He kept taking trains back and forth across the country to visit them. His memories are reflected in part by the soundtrack's recording of the voices of train conductors from the time of his youth."

While conceiving *Different Trains*, Reich realized that as a person who is Jewish, his youthful train rides might have taken him to a very different destination had he lived in Europe. Based on the mainly peaceful recollections of U.S. residents, and the horrific associations of European World War II survivors, his soundtrack also incorporates genuine sounds from the old European train system, including a few truly harrowing whistle cries.

"We've worked with Mr. Reich a number of times," Kitchen reports. "He'd love us to record our own version of the soundtrack, and we have every intention of doing so. If we have it done by January, rather than using the original soundtrack prepared by the Kronos Quartet, our soundtrack will combine Reich's mandated sounds and voices with our own playing."

So much has been written about what may be Schubert's most brilliant string quartet masterpiece, *Death and the Maiden*, that I wasn't sure Kitchen could add anything new. But he did remind me that the piece is "so captivating, so moving, so powerful, so exciting and so multi-layered that if it's at all well played, it can induce epiphanies. The potency of the fundamental material, and the galvanizing way Schubert handles its unfolding, gets more stunning the more you know about it."

The *Borromeos* will play from a facsimile of the original manuscript, which they will also project behind them to enhance the listening experience for the audience.

"When we all play from the entire score, rather than from copies of our individual parts, it completely changes the nature of the conversation," says Kitchen. "There are pieces we play from fair copies of the manuscripts Brahms, Beethoven and Schoenberg delivered to their publishers for the first printing. I've never seen one where they weren't making corrections up to the last second. The corrections may be small, but they are very telling. They really show you how the composer was thinking about the structure of the music. In both the Schubert and some of the Beethoven manuscripts that we've worked with, they often connect two sections, and there's this last-minute moment when they decide that there needs to be a tiny interlude between them. Even where the music seems to unfold without any corrections, the penmanship expresses their attitude and approach."

The concert opens with the quartet's original string transcription of Bach's *Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor*. One of the two organ works that Leopold Stokowski championed in orchestral transcription, it works extremely well when played by four string players.

"Every day brings a feeling of reinventing ourselves," says Kitchen. "It's challenging, but we're always opening doors to new possibilities."

STRINGS

Focus on the Recording Arts—Build a ‘Living Archive’ to Map a Group’s Evolution

The Borromeos use recordings to reveal their progress and deep musical knowledge to audiences

By Rory Williams



The Borromeos swapping sheet music for laptops

The Borromeo String Quartet is widely recognized for swapping sheet music for laptops, but the Living Archive might be its most ingenious use of technology yet. Like a parent obsessed, founding violinist Nicholas Kitchen has been documenting each of the Borromeo’s performances since 2003 and storing the digital recordings in what he calls the Living Archive.

Hundreds of rehearsals and performances later, he has amassed nearly 1,000 audio and video recordings of the group. The archive offers an impressive, yet incomplete, representation of the evolution of one musical family (hence the “living” title).

"It's amazing to see how a single piece of music changes in the hands of different performers," Kitchen says. "But even to look at how it changes in the hands of the same performer is a pretty remarkable process—reevaluation, reinvention, and this constant process of change."

Kitchen's long-term goal is to organize and present the material accrued by the Living Archive project in a way that allows people outside of the quartet to learn. "There's no reason not to have that inner knowledge of the musician organized to let people's curiosity go very deeply into the music," Kitchen says.

Much of this organization has been accomplished through what the group now offers online at LivingArchive.org. The DVD Nicholas Kitchen plays the Bach Ciaccona on 5 Great Violins from the Library of Congress studies the differences of Cremonese masterpieces, and the CD/DVD combo Mendelssohn: 1825 Ottetto features commentary on the 1825 and 1832 versions of the Ottetto, in addition to performance and manuscript-only tracks.

The 2011 CD *As it Was, Is, and Will Be* (GM Recordings and Living Archive) features Mohammed Fairouz's "Lamentation and Satire" and Bartok's Quartet No. 4. It also includes the Borromeo's live and studio versions of Gunther Schuller's String Quartet No. 4, so that listeners can measure for themselves how the quartet reacts before an audience.

"The chemistry of the two situations is quite different," Kitchen says. "The sounds are a little smoother, a little more cohesive, and there's more internal refinement in the way the edited version holds together. But there is a kind of energy conveyed in the live performance, and you can feel the difference.

"Even when you have the same players, it's pretty amazing when you see a Debussy quartet start and the group does a certain type of performance, and that's the greatest performance they conceive of at that moment and they're responding to the score. But then you come back to it a couple of years later and it's changed. You are reinventing it yet again. It's remarkable how that happens and how much it changes."

GRAMOPHONE

CD REVIEW:

BORROMEO STRING QUARTET

“As It Was, Is, and Will Be”

Bartók • Schuller • Fairouz

By **Donald Rosenberg**

The Boston-based Borromeo String Quartet are a fearless ensemble who appear to savour every sonic and atmospheric challenge

On their new disc, they take up a 20th-century classic, Bartók's String Quartet No 4, and two striking recent works requiring similarly scrupulous attention to expressive extremity.

In a curious and welcome departure, the recording contains two performances of Gunther Schuller's String Quartet No 4 – one in concert and the next captured in the studio. The juxtaposition lets the listener go beneath the surface of Schuller's invigorating and moody writing, with its homages to Mozart and Beethoven, and plunge into a brooding and vehement sound world redolent of Bartók (minus the folk inspiration). Both performances are gripping, but the slightly more spacious studio version heightens Schuller's masterful musical suspense.

The Borromeo players achieve the special balancing act of patience and ferocity in Mohammed Fairouz's Lamentation and Satire, an intensely felt score in which the instruments engage in compelling duos, a fugue of doleful urgency and a farewell utterly bereft of hope.

The disc begins with the Bartók, a piece that remains jolting almost 85 years after its creation. The music requires the utmost concentration if the intricate rhythmic figures and eerie effects are to seize the ears. The Borromeo do so through painstaking adherence to dynamics, accents, texture, syncopations over the bar and telepathic interplay. As played by this brilliant ensemble, the Bartók is an exhilarating expedition that sets the scene for the bold journeys to come in the Schuller and Fairouz works.



APPLE STORE CONCERT



7:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Recording on a Mac: The Borromeo String Quartet

Boston's Borromeo String Quartet is redefining the classical music landscape through innovative use of MacBook Pro, iPad, and video projection in live performances. Join the group as they talk about how they make their own videos and live concert recordings while on tour using Final Cut Pro and Adobe After Effects. Then stay for a short performance by this critically acclaimed ensemble.



THE SOPHIAN

Turning Heads Without Turning Pages

By Madeline Zehnder

The laptops form a circle onstage, each MacBook mounted on an adjustable stand and trailing an impressive tangle of wires. Yet the musicians who take the stage belong not to an electropop group but to the Borromeo String Quartet, an ensemble known for its contemporary approach to classical masterpieces. A very contemporary approach, in fact: in place of printed sheet music, the quartet's players perform from scores uploaded onto laptops. The Borromeo's use of computers began with first violinist Nicholas Kitchen's desire to read from a full score rather than an individual part – a difficult task with a long and unwieldy paper score, but an easily manageable one with a MacBook outfitted with a special pedal for turning pages. While Kitchen's colleagues expressed some initial resistance – in an interview with Daniel J. Wakin of the New York Times, Kristopher Tong, the group's second violinist, recalled worries that playing off a full score would weaken listening within the ensemble – all four players now use the laptops, which enable them to play directly from scanned manuscripts often penned by the composer's own hand.

For their Jan. 21 performance at Smith's Sweeney Concert Hall presented as part of the Music in Deerfield concert series, the Borromeo opened with J.S. Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor for Organ, BWV 582, arranged for string quartet by Kitchen. While the group sounded a bit thin at times, the music never quite achieving the wall-like force this piece has when played on the organ, the players tackled each of the work's twenty variations with a clarity and restraint particularly effective in the piece's densest contrapuntal passages.

Electronics took on renewed importance in the group's performance of Steve Reich's *Different Trains* (1988), a piece for string quartet and tape. Reich's electronic track blends fragments of interviews, sirens and mechanical train sounds into an accompanying aural collage that links his childhood memories of train journeys in the 1940s with reflections on WWII concentration camp transport trains. Using light amplification, the live ensemble weaves in and out of the tapestry of sound and place created by the electronics and a pre-recorded string quartet – sounds here elegantly supplied by the Kronos quartet. Under the Borromeo's bows, Reich's repeated motifs seemed to build into shifting modules of colors and sonorities; in the first movement, cello and second violin wails created a bright and expansive American sound, while in the second movement (II. Europe – During the War), the ensemble darkened, shaping the music's oscillating passages into an atmosphere of palpable anxiety. Dmitri Murrath, who subbed for violist Mai Motobuchi, deserves special commendation for

his confident and rich tone, which added warmth to the pre-recorded voices that the viola echoes as a second, simultaneous "vocalist."

The quartet returned to classical repertoire with their final piece, Franz Schubert's String Quartet in D Minor, D. 810, "Der Tod und das Mädchen" ("Death and the Maiden"). During the first two movements of the work, Kitchen projected his score stage for the audience to follow along with. Schubert's scratchy handwriting and notational shortcuts made reading the notes from the balcony difficult, but seeing the original creation onstage was oddly moving.

Like many romantic works, "Death and the Maiden" turns on contrast; the quartet's savage opening bars give way to ones the Borromeo expressed with great delicacy and sweetness. As a whole, the group favored a less romantic approach than many other ensembles, using a more detached bowing that gave piano sections a crystalline quality and humming intensity. This interpretative choice sometimes proved less effective in louder sections, where the music often seemed to crave longer phrases and a more orchestral sound. Nonetheless, it was a powerful and technically impressive performance – especially in the final section of the fourth movement, where the music builds to almost unplayable frenzy. The piece draws its "Death and the Maiden" nickname from a poem Schubert first set for voice (and uses here as a theme in the quartet's second movement); the music is ferocious in its confrontation of darkness and death, and the final movement ends with exuberance that verges on madness. With the Borromeo's vigorous interpretation, I almost expected the laptops to spark and explode during the piece's concluding bars – a final burst of creativity against consuming darkness.

The Boston Globe

Borromeo Quartet completes traversal of Beethoven's String Quartets

By Jeremy Eichler, Classical Music Critic

There was no filler, no curtain-raisers, no bonbons on the Borromeo String Quartet's program Sunday afternoon at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Just three summits of the chamber literature looming there, craggy and vertiginous: Beethoven's Quartets Opp. 130, 131, and 132.

The program was the last stop in the Borromeo's traversal of the complete Beethoven Quartets, one that stretched over two years and three different venues, tracing the arc of the Gardner's own Sunday concert series as it migrated from the museum's Tapestry Room, to temporary quarters at MassArt, to the recently built Calderwood Hall.

Ensembles don't so much rehearse and perform these scores as they do live with them over the course of their careers. Sunday's concluding program boasted the combination of precision and vibrancy that has become a hallmark of the Borromeo's Beethoven in recent years. It was not a note-perfect performance for the ages, but a vital living document of one group's ever-evolving relationship to music at the center of its repertoire.

For the searching introduction to Op. 132, the Borromeo reached for an unvarnished, almost grainy sound that worked in the moment like a darkly abstract canvas, pregnant with possibility. A certain pointedness of articulation in the second and final movements brought out the more classical elements of this forward-looking

music. The quietly glowing "Heiliger Dankgesang" — once aptly described by Aldous Huxley as "water on water, calm sliding over calm" — was its own self-enclosed world, as it must be.

The Quartet Op. 131 plays out in seven interconnected movements, here organically paced and delivered with an electrifying closing Allegro. For the ending of Op. 130, and the cycle as a whole, the Borromeo chose Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge" (one of two possible conclusions). A sense of existential struggle is written into this howling, premonitory music, and the Borromeo dramatized that element, pushing instruments and techniques to their outermost limits. It was a fitting close to an epic cycle.

Meanwhile, the new Calderwood Hall continues to offer enormous potential for the Gardner's future musical programming, but during Sunday's program itself, I couldn't help but wonder whether anything can be done to make the acoustics less dry. The Borromeo made the best of things, and throughout the afternoon, the expressive generosity of Nicholas Kitchen's playing on first violin was a particular pleasure. So was the larger sense of how far this ensemble as a whole has grown in its most recent configuration. Appropriately enough, as one Beethoven cycle ends for this quartet, plans for another are already taking shape, in Japan in 2013.

The Boston Globe

Borromeo gets back to Beethoven

By David Weininger, Classical Music Writer

The sight of four MacBook Pros on the stage of the Gardner Museum's Tapestry Room on Sunday afternoon could only mean that the Borromeo String Quartet was in the house – back from their summer adventures to resume the Beethoven cycle that the foursome began in April. The combination of Beethoven's music, 16th-century tapestries hanging on the wall, and the computers made for an intriguing clash of cultures.

The Borromeo is traversing Beethoven's quartets by what you might call the sampler formula: one quartet each from the composer's early, middle, and late periods, allowing listeners to absorb the composer's astonishing development in miniature. Sunday's concert opened with the Quartet in A major, Op.18 No.5 and closed with the E-flat Quartet, Op.127. The two share one obvious point of common ground: a slow movement cast as a theme and variations. In the earlier quartet, Beethoven demonstrates his aptitude in a form that was crucial to his forebears; in the later one, he transcends and reinvents the tradition. The later movement has an

ethereal sense of flow, each variation giving way seamlessly to the next. It is a long, spellbinding movement, music to get lost in; yet when it slips away, there is an uncanny sense that it has ended all too soon.

Those two movements featured some of the Borromeo's finest playing of the day. In the early movement there was buoyancy and an alertness to Beethoven's startling gambits; in the later one, delicately spun melodies and an ideal sense of pacing. Elsewhere in both quartets, things were less assured, including patches of uncertain intonation and a somewhat coarse sound. Nevertheless, what the playing lacked in polish it made up for in drive and intensity.

Between these two came Beethoven's "Serioso" Quartet in F minor, Op. 95. This furiously concentrated work, one of the shortest of Beethoven's quartets, made the strongest overall impression of the afternoon. The Borromeo's playing was restless and insistent, from the piece's edgy opening to the coda, played with a thrilling sense of abandon.

The New York Times

MUSIC

Daniel J. Wakin Looks at Music in 2011



By DANIEL J. WAKIN

<http://mobile.nytimes.com/article?a=884303&f=81>

THIS holiday season brings a set of gifts for the world of classical music, in the form of the highly uncoveted and arbitrarily granted Special Awards for 2011. It was a year of financial hardship for the arts (what year isn't?), especially for many opera houses, symphony orchestras, festivals and chamber music organizations, but high points also abounded. The following 10 prizes are bestowed in no particular order.

THE DENNER AWARD The highest honor for technological innovation is named after Johann Christoph Denner, who slapped some keys on a reed instrument and invented the modern clarinet around 1700. This year yielded four recipients: the New York Philharmonic, for starting its superb digital archive; [imslp.com](#), a free database with a vast collection of musical scores; [the Borromeo String Quartet](#), for performing with laptops instead of sheet music; and Jeffrey Kahane, the pianist and conductor, who used an iPad as a score to lead the New York Philharmonic.

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ANGELIQUE KIDJO & FRIENDS: SPIRIT RISING

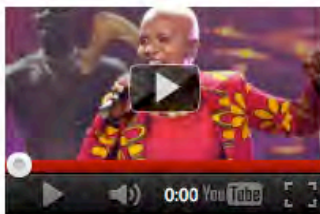
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- Batonga
- I Think Ur A Contra (with Ezra Koenig)
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Angelique Kidjo
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Boston Musical Intelligencer

IN: REVIEWS

Rock-Solid Borromeo in Rockport



by Michael Rocha

On Bastille Day 2011, in an idyllic New England coastal village, on a picture-perfect summer evening featuring a refreshing bit of chill in the air and a nearly full Buck Moon, the Borromeo String Quartet offered a wide-ranging concert as part of the Rockport Chamber Music Festival.

Speaking of multifaceted aesthetic triumphs, the Borromeo String Quartet is at the top of its game. Formed over two decades ago and still consisting of two of the original members (husband and wife Nicholas Kitchen, violin and Yeesun Kim, cello), the eight-handed, 40-fingered Borromonster is an elegant beast that breathes musical fire. Despite the group's longevity, these musicians are decidedly twenty-first century and were early adopters of digital musical scores. Alas, there was an unfortunate drawback in this particular venue: screen glare necessitated the drawing of the woven wooden screen behind the stage prior to the start of the concert, depriving the audience of a glowing sunset over the harbor. Pity! Someone definitely needs to suggest anti-glare filters for the group's computer monitors. (Trivia corner: In case you're wondering, the Borromeos take their name from the Borromeo islands in Lago Maggiore, northern Italy, where they performed their inaugural concerts.)

Once the capacity crowd had settled into the cushy-comfy seats, the dulcet sounds of Mozart wafted through the auditorium as the Borromeos plunged in to his String Quartet No. 18 in A Major ("The Drum"). The penultimate in a set of a half-dozen quartets dedicated to his friend Franz Joseph Haydn, this is music at the pinnacle of the Classical period. Apparently, despite his reputation for tossing off fully formed works, Wolfgang struggled to craft these quartets

'just so' for the highly respected Haydn, and the original manuscripts contain numerous uncharacteristic strikethroughs and rewrites. We were thus treated to music penned by a composer at the peak of his creative powers and recreated by instrumentalists at the apex of their craft. Light, airy melodies soared through the lofty space as we were enveloped by this gentle, refined, exquisitely woven aural tapestry. Subjects passed seamlessly from player to player in a crystal-clear dialogue that sharply delineated the inner structures of the music. Violinist Kitchen was as rock-solid as the coastline, playing with Federer-like coolness. Meanwhile, his instrumental counterpart Kristopher Tong sawed with great gusto and animation. Stoic, relatively undemonstrative Yeeseun Kim effectively transmogrified her cello into a drum during the third movement *Andante* (from which the piece obviously derives its sobriquet), and sweet-faced violist Mai Motobuchi tenderly cradled her instrument while spinning flawless melodic accompaniment.

And then everything changed. With a click of a mouse, we were hurtled from 1785 to 2005, and the sweet melodies of Mozart were replaced by the tart imaginings of contemporary American composer Daniel Brewbaker. Quite the juxtaposition, as the musical palette went from NECCO pastels to graffiti fluorescence. As explained in illuminating introductory remarks by Kitchen, Brewbaker's *Dance for My Fathers* (String Quartet No. 2), commissioned for Juilliard's centennial, is a four-movement homage to a selection of the composer's mentors, musicians Roger Sessions, Gordon Binkerd, and Vincent Persichetti, as well as Brewbaker's own father. Overall, this was the sort of music that was challenging for both performers and listeners, with angular melodic lines and jarring harmonies. "Roger's Session" was tense and high-strung, featuring scampering pizzicato riffs; "Gordon's Garden" sounded like a garden of thistles; the third movement tribute to the elder Brewbaker was somewhat mellower and pensively nostalgic; the final movement tribute to Persichetti was darkly frenetic and hyper-demanding. Surprised the performers' instruments didn't burst aflame as they blazed through this edgy work. Their playing was virtually flawless, with nary a stray squeak. Consistently musical, consistently passionate, consistently precise, they played as one. This is especially impressive given their clearly distinct musical personalities: suave Kitchen, energetic Tong, motherly Motobuchi, steady Kim.

Appropriately enough on this Bastille Day, the final work of the evening was Frenchman Claude Debussy's single contribution to the string quartet genre, his *Opus 10*. Written in 1894, when the composer was in his early 30s, this is one of the few works to which Debussy ascribed a tonal key (g minor). Shimmery, noble, festooned with whole-tone and pentatonic scales, this piece featured an entirely new and rich soundscape consisting of shifting colors and glittering waves of emotion as the composer forged a new path. Once again, the Borromeos were more than up to the task as they swayed rhythmically in a complex dance during which the instruments became extensions of themselves.

Actually, after hearing the Borromeos deftly handle each of these disparate compositions with grace and seemingly effortless precision, I came to the conclusion that they could make *Colonoscopy in Z minor* by "Weird Al" Jankovic sound compelling. There's seemingly nothing in the string quartet repertoire that is beyond their wide-ranging grasp.

And so the evening, aesthetically pleasing in every way, drew to a close. If you've yet to experience the passionate elegance of the Borromeo String Quartet, what are you waiting for? And the new home of Rockport Music is not to be missed. The Shalin Liu Performance Center features events year-round.

Computers help quartet find music, turn pages on stage

By Geraldine Feedman

For the celebrated Borromeo String Quartet, the future is now.

It all started when quartet violinist Nicholas Kitchen was looking at Mendelssohn's manuscript of his string octet in the Library of Congress' treasure vault. Kitchen is a frequent visitor there because he plays on a violin on loan from the library's collection, and the octet was a piece the Borromeo wanted to play on its concert Sunday as part of the Renaissance Musical Arts series.

The quartet, named for Italy's Borromeo Islands, where the group first performed, includes founders Kitchen and cellist Yeesun Kim, violinist Kristopher Tong (2006) and violist Mai Motobuchi (2000).

"I realized the manuscript was not the same. One hundred bars were changed by Mendelssohn before it was published," Kitchen said last month from Colorado, where the quartet was on tour. "He'd written it in 1825 at 16 and presented it at his teacher's birthday party. It was well-known right away. But seven years later, he went to [music publishing house] Breitkopf & Hartel and revised it."

Because there were no parts for the original version, Kitchen received permission to make the parts, but that would take time.

Then he thought about using computers, he said.

"We were inspired by Chris O'Riley," Kitchen said.

As audience members noted when pianist O'Riley recently performed at The Egg, he read his charts from a laptop propped up where the piano's music stand usually is. To turn the pages, O'Riley hit a foot pedal that was hooked up to the computer's USB port.

Because the Mendelssohn manuscript is on a PDF file, it can be downloaded onto any computer. Even better, through the use of the Acrobat Professional program, musicians can make markings on the music and even change the zoom feature. The Borromeo decided to give it a try. Each read off a computer that sat on a specially made stand. Instead of reading each individual part, the musicians read the actual score, page by page, written in Mendelssohn's own hand.

"It was a revelation for us in terms of rehearsal," Kitchen said, adding that Mendelssohn wrote with a beautiful penmanship and made few mistakes.

Since then, the Borromeo only works off computers. During performances, a power cord is hidden under "a very pretty blanket" obtained when the quartet played for the King of Thailand, he said. (Continued)

**Technology at the service of learning:
For group member, using new technologies, as a work tool,
contributes to the development of musicians.**

Interview with Nicholas Kitchen of the Borromeo String Quartet and
Andre Cananea, Editor of the Jornal da Paraíba

AC: You have a very positive experience with technology. How does the conservative audience see this approach, between classical music and technology?

NK: Actually, the significance of our use of technology for reading music is internal (unlike the videos, which are obviously external!). We can understand the music better by each of us seeing all of the parts, the full score. This would not be possible with paper music and the computers offer a real solution to this challenge. Having adopted this method we make every effort for it not to detract from the experience the audience is used to. MacBooks are quite elegant and quiet and we use something very much like the traditional wire stand. When we plug in (we can also play from battery) there are some ugly cords, but we take an attractive cloth (from Thailand, as a matter of fact) and cover the power supplies. Audiences are naturally curious about our methods but actually once the music begins there is no particular meaning to the electronic reading of music, and we try to make sure that the use of electronic or paper music does not disturb the audiences' ability to concentrate on listening.

AC: Moreover, how technology has helped the Borromeo and classical music?

NK: The ability to work off of complete scores has profound effects on the quality of our work, and if more classical musicians embrace the way the computer can allow the use of full scores it is impossible that we will not all be better musicians because of this. Of course there are specialized experiences which are good for stimulating communications. Playing an ensemble piece for memory, looking at nothing, can be very stimulating and liberating. Playing off of a single line part where you only see your notes is something of a mid-point between memory and score reading. In learning, every tool should be used, including these experiences. But I think in terms of learning a huge step forward is taken when everyone involved can discuss the music seeing all of its parts - the full score. The ability to connect to the composer's manuscript is also a huge benefit, and there is the small benefit that you are no longer vulnerable to bad lighting conditions. I have not even begun to mention how much modern players can benefit from recording themselves and studying in this way. That is another subject, but I do think technology is giving us layer upon layer of new and powerful tools.

AC: In the USA, the use of technology in classical music has been a trend or is it something off?

NK: There are definitely many musicians who have grown up with suspicion of computers, and one has to feel confident with how to deal with the computer in order to trust yourself to use it. Of course, it is not so easy to learn to drive a car, either, but we are sure that it is a machine which helps us. Change happens slowly, but I have seen very few musicians who do not see many of the quite real benefits of working with the resources offered by the computer as a reading tool. I think it will take a fairly long time for it to settle into the larger community, and paper will always be useful, too...

AC: Do you think technology can contribute to bring more audience to classical music, especially those who are far from music school?

NK: Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Vivaldi (to just name a few) created music that we relate to as if it is a monument in stone. But every one of the names I mentioned - each of them was a breathtaking improviser. They combined an ability to use everything from fixed numerical proportions to audacious spontaneous ornaments. When we see this music within this context of masterful spontaneity we see that it is inviting us and inciting us to create in the present, to have the courage to create for each other things with emotional gravity, things with fanciful playfulness, things with reassuring order. Mixing new music and old, using the video conversation to give a special window on the content of the music, all these are natural invitations to new listeners to let themselves start to know this treasure-chest. By learning the beauties of what has been left for us we celebrate our past and we better define what we can do of value for each other in the present. I and we love playing our part in this conversation.

With regard to technology and the nature of schooling the possibilities of learning by video-conference are tremendous. I think someone without access to a music school can already accumulate a tremendous amount of information just searching on the internet. If schools are able to build these resources into a new pedagogy, then we will really have a world with greatly increased opportunities for everyone, no matter where they live. In my own life, I do a fair amount of teaching through video-conferencing, and my son studies regularly works with his grandmother on violin and other subjects. They are connected over iChat though they are 700 miles apart.

C2+m/Erudito

Entrevista
Nick Kitchen
VIOLINISTA

João Marcos Coelho
ESPECIAL PARA O ESTADO

O quarteto de cordas é uma das matrizes históricas da música camerística e normalmente considerado um dos gêneros mais áridos da música de concerto. A fórmula dos dois violinos, viola e violoncelo – que Goethe chamou de “conversa a quatro” – emergiu na segunda metade do século 18 como laboratório preferencial de experimentação. A partir da tríade clássica Haydn-Mozart-Beethoven, responsável por dezenas de obras-primas, deixou de ser assunto de amadores. Virou terreno de profissionais.

Pois é este universo abstrato por excelência que o quarteto norte-americano Borromeo revitaliza transformando seus concertos em acontecimentos tanto sonoros quanto visuais. Eles fazem duas apresentações gratuitas imperdíveis em setembro no Brasil – dia 7, na Basílica das Neves, em João Pessoa, dia 8 na Basílica do Carmo, em Recife, dentro do Festival MIMO de música instrumental que se realizará entre 3 e 9 de setembro em Olinda, Recife, João Pessoa e Ouro Preto. O público poderá conferir se tantas novidades – como o uso de laptops para leitura das partituras, com passagem de páginas feitas em pedais, projeção de manuscritos originais e animações criadas por Nick Kitchen num telão – contribuem ou dispersam a audição. O repertório é variadíssimo. Começa com três animações de Nick emoldurando arranjos da famosa fuga para o quinteto de Bach BWV 523, o Vivace do quarteto opus 135 de Beethoven e Santa Claus Is Comin to Town, música de Coats e Gillespie arranjada por Nick a partir da versão do pianista de jazz Bill Evans. Em seguida, a estreia sul-americana do quarteto *Love Notes to Napa*, de Daniel Brevik, compositor norte-americano de 61 anos, com projeção de partituras e o terceiro dos quartetos Razumovsky, opus 59, de Beethoven, com projeção do manuscrito.

Fundado em 1989 no New England Conservatory de Boston, o Borromeo é desde então quarteto residente desta que é uma das mais prestigiosas escolas de música dos Estados Unidos. Tem no primeiro violino Nick Kitchen seu porta-voz. Foi ele

quem se encantou com a possibilidade de usar a informática, abandonando o uso de partituras de papel, em concertos. Seus três parceiros no Borromeo são asiáticos: Kristopher Tong (segundo violino), Mai Motobuchi (viola) e Yeesun Kim (violoncelo). Abaixo, trechos da entrevista de Nick Kitchen ao Estado.

● **Como nasceu a ideia de ler as partituras por computador?**

Nick Kitchen – Nasceu do desejo de tocar a partir das partituras completas. Você pode ver tudo o que está acontecendo na música a todo momento. Cada elemento simultâneo está lá alinhado em cada página e você pode ver como a música se encaixa. Para poder conter toda

essa informação, as partituras sempre têm muitas páginas. A parte que cada intérprete lê só contém a música a partir da qual toca seu instrumento, e tem poucas páginas.

Há tanta informação adicional e “insights” que surgem a partir dos elementos que se interrelacionam e fazem a frase funcionar musicalmente. Pode-se notar muitos detalhes novos nas diversas camadas de música cada vez que olhamos para a partitura completa. Mas, na hora de tocar, é difícil virar as páginas de uma partitura completa.

● **Você pode dar exemplos específicos de mudanças na interpretação ou insights a partir desta nova maneira de ler partituras?**

Quando todos tocam lendo só

as partes individuais de seus instrumentos, um bom tempo dos ensaios é gasto com a pergunta: “O que você tem aí?” Nesse momento, todos fazem anotações nas suas partes. Estamos acostumados com isso, mas perde-se tempo. Quando todo mundo lê a partitura total, a pergunta desaparece. Todos veem o que os demais tocam e instantaneamente entendem o que está acontecendo. É útil nas obras conhecidas, mas fica extraordinário quando se lida com música contemporânea. O processo fica dez vezes mais rápido, no mínimo. Em Beethoven, frequentemente os grupos uniformizam as arcadas e os fraseados. Mas, tocando a partir das partituras, verificamos que Beethoven muitas vezes fez marcações diferen-

tes para cada instrumento. Naturalmente pode-se chegar a este resultado trabalhando só com as partes, mas leva mais tempo. Também foi importante ensaiar com o manuscrito original. Muitas bibliotecas têm estes tesouros em arquivos digitais, podemos acessá-los em versões PDF. Muitas obras-primas podem ser vistas no formato original. Há detalhes reveladores. Haydn, por exemplo, não definiu as articulações, deixando a decisão para os músicos.

● **Ao exibir a partitura numa tela atrás do quarteto no palco, vocês criam uma cena mais atraente para o público. Mas tanto aparato tecnológico não distrai a atenção necessária para ouvir a música?**

Quando adicionamos um proje-

tor à experiência de ouvir um concerto, dividimos com o público algo que ele leva para casa depois. Nós também tocamos com projeção de animação criada por mim, sincronizada (através do pedal) com a música. É nossa imaginação se expressando sobre a música que interpretamos. A música não é mero monumento estático que admiramos, mas um veículo que interage com a imaginação do público.

● **Quais os equipamentos técnicos que o quarteto usa em cena?**

Laptops, porque eles têm uma tela relativamente grande (dois de nós utilizamos telas de 17 polegadas) e um sistema confiável de baterias, mesmo que estejamos ligados na tomada.

QUARTETO DE PRESTES A VIR AO PAÍS, O BORROMEO FALA DO SALTO QUE A INTERPRETAÇÃO PODE DAR COM A TECNOLOGIA

TECLAS

A OPINIÃO DOS BRASILEIROS DO QUARTETO DE CORDAS DA CIDADE DE SÃO PAULO



Betina Stegman
PRIMEIRO VIOLINO

“Eu ainda acho que a música é uma arte auditiva, e não visual. Outro dia tocamos com um pianista chinês que usava um notebook durante o concerto. É óbvio que o estímulo eletrônico também existe, mas o gostar não se explica”



Nelson Rios
SEGUNDO VIOLINO

“Ter a partitura na frente dá uma compreensão maior, mas isso já deve acontecer mentalmente. A parte individual só funciona se você tiver a compreensão do texto integral. Não vejo vantagem para o público visualizar a partitura durante a execução.”



Marcelo Jaffé
VIOLA

“A partitura na frente não altera a interpretação. Ela é construída ao longo do processo de compreensão da peça, que inclui estudo da biografia, técnica de composição, estilo e também a partitura. Um bom camerista aprende as outras partes junto com a sua.”

Translated from "Quarteto De Teclas"

JMC: How did you get the idea to perform from full four-part musical scores using the computer?

NK: The idea to use the computer for music reading was born from the desire to play off of the complete score. All musicians learn a tremendous amount from studying full scores. When you have an orchestra or a chamber ensemble the tradition is that a "score" is printed where all the parts are on one staff. You see everything that is happening at every moment in the music. Each simultaneous element is lined up on the page. You see exactly the way that the music fits together. The conductor of an orchestra always works from complete score so that they will understand the intricate interweaving of all the instrumental parts. With these multiple parts the score usually has many pages. The "part" that each musician reads from in performance, on the other hand, has printed on it only what that particular instrument plays. It is usually only a few pages long.

It was always my wish to play the pieces that I perform from the full score. Whether it is a piece with piano and violin, a piano trio, a quartet, a concerto or a symphony, so many insights come from viewing all the elements that interweave with each other to make a phrase work musically. One notices layer upon layer of detail each time one looks at it. But while actually playing there is little practical possibility of turning the many pages of a full score. Also, imagine if every member, particularly of an orchestra, played from a full score of paper: you would end up with a book sized piece of music on every stand - thousands of pages. It is not practical on many levels.

So, prior to the computer, I always took advantage of any chance that I had to play off of the score but was usually left to study the score separately from playing.

In 2007 I saw two pianists use electronic scores and I realized instantly that the computer offered a path to doing what I and other musicians had so often dreamed of - to play off of the complete score. I looked on the internet for USB page-turners and ended up

purchasing something called "FooTime". Since then the quartet and I have made a transition to pedals that I make at home and program myself (which also means I can maintain and repair the pedals). Within a couple of months I had brought the computer on stage and was starting to enjoy the wonderful benefits of seeing everything that was happening in the music while playing.

As I got used to it other members of the Borromeo Quartet were interested in doing it as well, and within a short time we were all reading off of the complete score, reading pdf files on a computer and turning the pages with our feet.

JMC: Playing from a computer, you've said in interviews, means that "everyone who is participating can be looking at the score, and score study becomes a communal exchange of information. This is really a complete transformation of the working process". Can you give some specific examples of changes in interpretation or insights from this new way of reading the scores?

When everyone is playing from parts a huge percentage of rehearsal is spent asking and answering "What do you have there?" Players write cues in their part. We are very used to this, but it occupies a lot of rehearsal time. When everyone is reading from the score, this question simply does not exist. Everyone sees instantly what the other player has and how it fits with what they are playing. This is already beneficial in familiar music but becomes a totally new experience when dealing with contemporary music. With new music, we have no prior knowledge and often with parts the experience of just trying to stay together in unfamiliar music is extremely stressful. I do not exaggerate to say that by playing off of the score, the process goes perhaps 10 times faster. And of course staying oriented in this unfamiliar environment one is not just focusing on small details as markers but is in a relaxed way seeing the way the unfamiliar music fits together in all of its details. This also means that composers can revise easily their scores once the rehearsals begin. With a quick export from their music-writing program and the use of a thumb drive that we pass around, we are

playing the revision that they made minutes ago. Another important perspective is to see with confidence when a composer wishes a group not to be homogenous. For example, in Beethoven, a group often unifies its bowings and phrasings, but with everyone looking at the score we often realize that Beethoven gave independent markings to all of the instruments, purposefully asking them to play differently. Usually trying this varied version with confidence works beautifully as composers like Beethoven made these kind of suggestions with fantastic knowledge of performance. One can realize these things using parts, but again, it takes a huge amount of time to discover and become confident of the heterogeneous intention. With the time it takes to be sure of one spot many similar spots are never gotten to.

There is another aspect of playing off of the full score that has added something wonderful on a human level. String Quartets are notorious for being a volatile environment. Everyone is passionate about the way they feel the music and yet they have to achieve total ensemble, with every detail coordinated. This often causes arguments and tensions as players try to both retain their conviction and simultaneously learn how to synchronize their actions. Playing from the complete score we have found that we have much more understanding of why each part and each person feels the way they do. We are much more able to come up with suggestions that naturally incorporate everyone's point of view. This is very meaningful and has the effect that when we really arrive at a conclusion the quality of judgement behind it is much higher and much more shared by every participant.

The other unexpected resource that becomes available with the computer is that it is very easy to rehearse using the composer's original manuscript. Many libraries have digitized these precious treasures and through various methods a performer can gain access to pdf files of these works. Sometimes they are on the internet. Sometimes one has to order them specially from the library, but many of the greatest works of chamber music can be seen in their manuscript form.

Often these hand-written scores communicate

vividly something about how the composer felt about the music he or she was writing. There are telling details, like when Haydn leaves articulations quite unspecified, leaving choices much more in the hands of the performer. Often, it is something not so easily analyzed, but one gets a strong feeling of connection with the energies active in the creation of the work. Also, so often the manuscript shows options which were considered and discarded or altered as the composer worked. These are deeply stimulating to see. When seeing a modern score of a masterwork, we are seeing a work we have heard hundreds of times. We can have the illusion the work always existed and that its details arrived in the world complete. Seeing the changes that the composer struggled with, we feel how hard they worked to find just the right expression. This adds something very inspiring into rehearsals as we try to feel out the options for how to present a work most effectively. Also sharing this with students and audience members lets all of us share the sense of insight and feel some relation to the moment of creation of some of the greatest pieces of music ever written.

JMC: By placing the score on a screen behind the quartet on stage, you create an attractive scene for the public. But can too much technology possibly distract the audience from hearing the music?

NK: The core of music is only what we hear. Fortunately, people have such a love of music, and what they hear can often connect to their heart in a way that is deeply satisfying. Musically, we need nothing but the sound, but when we see performers play, that is also enjoyable. We feel and see how the performer approaches the music. When we use a projector to add to the concert experience we are sharing something that we think will add to what the audience takes home from the concert. We have gained great inspiration looking at the manuscripts of the masterworks that we play. Letting the audience see that and explaining some of the meaning of the details can give them a very special feeling of connection with the creation of the piece. Also, we do some playing of music with animations that I have created which are synchronized (by foot pedal) with the music we are playing. We

do this because they are expressions of our imaginative relationship with the music we are playing and we want to encourage listeners to think of music not just as some great monument to admire in a static way but as a vehicle that interacts with their imagination, that invites them to explore their own feelings about what is happening.

So, if the projector should fail in a performance nothing essential will be lost. The concert will go on and the essence of the music will be complete. But we do hope that giving another dimension through projection will allow the audience to participate in the rich complexity which is part of our feeling about the music.

JMC: The quartet offers a different twist on classical music by using MacBook Pro laptops, video projection and iPads during its performances. Can you describe how they are used?

We use laptops because they have a fairly large screen (two of us use 17-inch screens) and they have a well tested battery mechanism, though we plug in anyway. Apple computers also happen to be very quiet. For a laptop, the job of reading a pdf is very easy. We do have to do a few things like tell the computer not to go to sleep. As you can imagine, our music folder on each computer holds really the entire repertoire that we play. I keep this backed up on a few thumb drives in my violin case. If a truck should drive over my laptop I only have to borrow some computer and within minutes I will be playing from my own part again. Any computer will work - Windows, Mac, anything that can read a pdf.

The pedal, which as I mentioned is homemade, is really a USB keyboard with two buttons: page down, and page up (iPad is slightly different). All computers respond to these commands. The USB connection means the pedal is powered from the computer, not requiring any battery of its own. On stage each computer is its own system. Each one of us turns our own pages. It has turned out that the computers are extremely reliable, but the comfort is that if any one computer should encounter a problem, there are three more computers with the identical full score on

them. We just would turn to our neighbor and read off of theirs. This did happen on one occasion and I just turned my screen towards the violist and we continued without a break.

We read the music from Adobe Acrobat Professional. This is a great program because it is extremely reliable (think of the number of users) and it has extensive annotation tools. We just open the pencil tool and mark as we wish. Also, Acrobat Professional has many tools for adjusting the way the document looks on the page. We can easily get rid of extra white space or duplicate pages so we can pedal forward only for a repeat in the music. Also, once we save the file in this way, it will open on another computer with the changes, as well as the markings. We just have to remember to save!

As far as iPads, I have also a homemade pedal that works for the iPad. The iPad is nice because it is SO small. In the end it is preferable to play off of the larger screen of the computer, but it would not be too difficult to arrange to play off of iPads. Where the iPad really does come in handy is in coaching. Especially with using the composers manuscript, often I am coaching a quartet and I want the students to see the manuscript as we work. I created a dual pedal which simultaneously sends a signal to the computer and the iPad. What I then do is put the computer facing the students and put the iPad on the same stand facing me. By using the dual pedal, we are both looking at the same thing. A projector can of course achieve the same thing and fortunately many classrooms are equipped with projectors, so we can often plug into these resources easily. Also, we give an Interpretation Class at our Conservatory, NEC, where we make a point of always projecting the score as we study in the class. When a student arrives with a printed score and no PDF version, I just hook the projector to the camera of the iPad and within a few seconds we are seeing the printed score on the wall.

Computers, we are realizing, are the greatest vehicle to go back into the past, and deeper into the music.

Festival »

Using notebooks and projections, quartet joins chamber music and technology

String Quartet uses technology to introduce public to the music world. Presentation of Borromeo may be seen in the Mimo



Borromeo String Quartet utiliza notebooks e projeções de partituras durante as apresentações

By Dule Reis

"We realized that computers are the best vehicles to go back and dig deeper into the music."

This phrase by violinist Nicholas Kitchen explains well the work of the Borromeo String Quartet. The group uses technology to track and even the public view scanned images of original scores of big names in classical music. The Kitchen pernambucanos may attend with his colleagues Kristopher Tong (violin), Yeesun Kim (cello) and Mai Motobuchi (viola) and their equipment in

action this Saturday (8), 18.30, in the Basilica of Mount Carmel, in Recife, during Shows International Music Olinda (Mimo).

On stage, the string quartet always presents with notebooks. Second Kitchen, the idea of using a PC or Mac for playback of music during the presentations was born of the desire to play with complete scores, since, generally, each player receives only its specific part. "You see everything that is happening in each moment. The musician sees exactly the way the music fits," he explains.

And how it would perform with a full score of paper? "You end up with a piece of music about the size of a book on each shelf, with thousands of pages. Not practical on many levels", says Kitchen. So in 2007, after watching the two pianists using electronic music, the musician decided to bet on computers.

The proposed project the music is the key issue for Borrromeo. "When we use a projector in order to add some experience to the performance share something that we think will add to what the audience takes home from the concert," says the musician. "Let the public see this, explaining some of the meanings of the details, you can give them a very special feeling of connection with the creation of the piece," he says.

Now, if the Borrromeo mune scores scanned mined both in libraries and on the Internet, available in PDF or other formats. "Sometimes, many of the greatest works of chamber music can be seen in its manuscript form. These scores demonstrate vividly something about how the composer felt about the music he was writing. There are revealing details," says the musician.

While the audience watches the musicians and accompany what is being played on the big screen, Kitchen, Tong, Kim and Motobuchi need to stay alert to their computers. On the screens, they come with all the musical notes. To turn the pages, they use a pedal created specifically for this task, called Footime. The equipment is simple, having two buttons - one for forward and one for return, and can be connected to any computer via USB port.

Generally, on stage, the members of the Borrromeo use their Apple notebooks. "They have a good size screen and are pretty easy to read a PDF," says Kitchen. Despite the convenience of computers before and during the presentations, the group needs to be aware of many details as you plug the computer to not depend on the battery and not set it to hibernate.

Another concern is archiving every notebook all the songs that will be performed. "I keep a backup on a flash drive in my violin case. If a truck passing over my laptop, I just need to borrow some borrowed computer. In a few minutes I'll play my part again," says the musician.

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Festival

Utilizando notebooks e projeções, quarteto une música de câmara à tecnologia

Quarteto de cordas usa tecnologia para inserir público no mundo da música. Apresentação do Borromeo poderá ser vista na MIMO

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Dúcio Reis

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Borromeo String Quartet utiliza notebooks e projeções de partituras durante as apresentações. "Percebemos que os computadores são os melhores veículos para voltar ao passado e ir mais fundo na música". Esta frase do violinista Nicholas Kitchen explica bem o trabalho do Borromeo String Quartet. O grupo utiliza a tecnologia para acompanhar e até mesmo exibir ao público imagens digitalizadas de partituras originais de grandes nomes da música clássica. Os pernambucanos poderão assistir Kitchen junto a seus colegas Kristopher Tong (violino), Yeesun Kim (violoncelo) e Mai Motobuchi (viola) e seus equipamentos em ação neste sábado (8), às 18h30, na Basílica do Carmo, no Recife, durante a Mostra Internacional de Música de Olinda (MIMO).

No palco, o quarteto de cordas sempre se apresenta com notebooks. Segundo Kitchen, a ideia de usar um PC ou Mac para a leitura da música durante as apresentações nasceu do desejo de tocar com partituras completas, já que, geralmente, cada músico recebe apenas a sua parte específica. "Você vê tudo que está acontecendo em cada momento. O músico vê exatamente o jeito em que a música se encaixa", explica.

E como seria se apresentar com uma partitura completa de papel? "Você acabaria com uma peça de música do tamanho de um livro em cada estante, com milhares de páginas. Não é prático em muitos níveis", desabafa Kitchen. Por isso, em 2007, após assistir a dois pianistas usando partituras eletrônicas, o músico resolveu apostar nos computadores.

A proposta de projetar as partituras é questão primordial para o Borromeo. "Quando usamos um projetor a fim de acrescentar alguma experiência à performance compartilhamos algo que achamos que vai somar ao que o público leva pra casa do concerto", explica o músico. "Deixar o público ver isso, explicando alguns dos significados dos detalhes, pode dar-lhes um sentimento muito especial de conexão com a criação da peça", conta.

Agora, o Borromeo se mune de partituras digitalizadas garimpadas tanto em bibliotecas como pela internet, disponibilizadas em PDF ou em outros formatos. "As vezes, muitas das maiores obras de música de câmara podem ser vistas em sua forma de manuscrito. Estas partituras demonstram vividamente algo sobre como o compositor se sentia em relação à música que estava escrevendo. Há detalhes reveladores", conta o músico.



Foottime é um pedal criado especificamente para que os músicos possam passar as páginas das partituras digitais.

grupo precisa ficar atento a diversos detalhes como plugar o computador para não depender da bateria e programá-lo para não hibernar.

Outra preocupação é arquivar em cada notebook todas as músicas que serão executadas. "Eu mantenho um backup em um pen drive no case do meu violino. Se um caminho passar por cima do meu laptop, eu só preciso pedir algum computador emprestado. Em poucos minutos vou tocar minha parte novamente", conta o músico.

Assista os vídeos de duas apresentações do Borromeo:

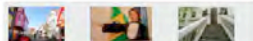
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FANFARE

Feature Article

A Conversation with Nicholas Kitchen of the Borromeo Quartet

By Maria Nockin / March – April Edition, Issue 35:4

http://www.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/35_4/3540180.aa_Conversation_Nicholas_Kitchen_Borromeo.html

On a cool fall day, I spoke with Borromeo Quartet first violinist Nicholas Kitchen, who was at the New England Conservatory. All four members of the quartet—besides Kitchen, violinist Kristopher Tong, violist Mai Motobuchi, and cellist Yeesun Kim—teach there. We spoke of the founding of the group, changes in its membership, and the new technologies that they are integrating into their performances.

Q: How did the Borromeo Quartet come into being?

A: We formed the quartet as a summer project to play concerts in Italy. Ruggero Allifranchini, the original second violinist, was Italian. His father was a music teacher near Milan. Ruggero asked him to arrange some concerts for us during the summer vacation. The first date we played was near the Borromeo Islands of Lago Maggiore. We visited the islands, and when we later decided to stay together as a quartet we adopted the name. Ruggero and I were both students of Szymon Goldberg at the Curtis Institute of Music. He encouraged us to do some of the usual summer activities, but added that he did not think we had to go to the usual places like Tanglewood or Aspen. He suggested we could arrange a few concerts and rehearse very hard for them. He thought that students who formed ensembles for such a project could have very positive experiences and we took him at his word. Our trip turned out beautifully. We played 10 concerts in the most charming Italian hill towns. It really was an amazing experience. We found that concerts that were to start at 9 p.m. actually began at 9:30. Dinner was afterwards! We have many wonderful memories of our first quartet concerts. We had a fantastic time that summer and we returned the following summer. Everything went well for us as a quartet, too, so that was the start of the Borromeo Quartet.

Right now, we teach at the New England Conservatory of Music, where we are the faculty quartet in residence. Usually, we have three hours of rehearsal together each day and each of us practices extra hours as well. After all that, we may play a concert! We keep very busy, but we love what we do and we are happy to put in the hours to make it work. There is a wonderful fullness in the way our lives are scheduled. We could probably arrange our lives so that we just played concerts, but we love being at the conservatory. It nourishes us and it's amazing how it all ties together. One of the composers whose music we play on our new CD,

Gunther Schuller, was the president of the conservatory for many years. You could not find a composer more deeply rooted in the conservatory's environment and more devoted to making it the great institution it is today. Although he is no longer the president, he started much of what goes on here today. It is filled with his spirit. We also have a significant presence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. We've done many cycles there, including all the Shostakovich quartets. We've done two Beethoven cycles and all the Schoenberg quartets there. We've also done Brahms chamber music there and we are about to do the complete Dvořák works for string quartet.

We also have a deep involvement with the Taos School of Music. We usually teach four weeks of the eight-week session there and have done that for quite a few years. Although we teach in Boston, we fly out and play concerts in various cities every three or four days. Actually, we were just in Scottsdale, Arizona, but not for a concert. We have adopted a new way of playing. Instead of using sheet music, we play from laptops. That fact interested the people at Cisco Systems and they asked us to attend an executive summit. They wanted us to give a concert and make a presentation on the technical side of our work. We really have invented a new way of reading music. For one thing, each player is looking at the entire score, not just at the part he or she is playing.

Q: How did you come up with the idea of using laptops instead of sheet music?

A: The tradition has been to use paper parts on which each player only sees his or her own part. Everyone could use the full score for a resource to consult and study, but no one could really play from it. Playing from complete scores has always been merely a dream. It has been done using large pages, but they are clumsy to carry around. I had seen some pianists turn pages with a pedal and I thought that would solve the problem we would have if we used laptops instead of sheet music. I got a pedal that we could use with our MacBook Pros and put full scores in PDF form on the computers. Since then, I've come up with a homemade pedal that fits our needs more exactly. Another important factor is that the MacBook is a very quiet machine. Right now I'm about to make a batch of pedals for colleagues and students. It took a bit of time, but being able to look at the score while playing has given us some enormous advantages. Entire pieces come together much more quickly when each player can see the parts of each of the other players, and the richness that communal understanding adds has proved transformative to our working process. We all see every layer of the music at once.

Q: Do you sometimes project the score so that the audience can also read it?

A: Yes, we do. I know that only a percentage of the people can read it, but I always ask how many listeners do not have any idea of how to read music. I get a few hands. Then I give a very short introduction to reading notes. Basically I point to my line and tell them, "This is what I play. When the notes go up I play higher tones and when they go down I play lower tones." It seems to help people out so that after the concert they are often proud that they could follow along. They say they could see where we were and how the instruments interacted. Sometimes we project the original manuscript. That communicates something really special to the public. They are usually quite excited, as are we.

Q: What is on your latest recording?

A: The newest is *As It Was, Is and Will Be*. It contains the String Quartet No. 4 by Béla Bartók, a live version and a studio version of Gunther Schuller's Quartet No. 4, and Mohammed Fairouz's *Lamentation and Satire*.

Q: Why did you record two versions of the Schuller?

A: We were doing a live performance of the Schuller in Jordan Hall, the main venue of the New England Conservatory. We have a long history of recording our concerts. We worked very hard with Schuller and when we finished playing he was happy enough with our rendition that he suggested we use the live recording on our upcoming CD. We agreed that something special had been caught in the live concert, but we also had a plan to record it in the studio, in fact in the very same hall, and we wanted to do that, too. We used to make all the live concerts available to the public on recordings, but we had to stop doing that because we became overloaded with them. The practice was putting too much material in circulation and producing it all was impossible. However, we do still record every concert because we love the idea of having a record of everything we do. So, we decided to show both versions on the disc. The studio version is, of course, done in takes. The best ones are selected and spliced together. I have become very involved in the editing process. I did the editing for this entire CD. I worked with Schuller on editing his quartet. It was a great experience to work with him in that way. We found that a great many people wanted recordings of our concerts because they want to take home the concert they have enjoyed. I've used high-quality audio and video equipment to record everything we do. Then, we can let the audience have some of it, too. We have recorded all our concerts since October of 2003. That's nearly a thousand concerts, by now, and we have a huge archive.

For three to four years there were order forms at our concerts and many people ordered CDs from us. It just became unwieldy for me because I was doing everything that pertained to engineering. It's also my own conviction that I want people to enjoy recorded music discs as a part of their lives and especially to connect these experiences with the live experience of making and listening to music. Recordings also offer a link to the unreachable musical past. Many people do not have a musical background and compact discs offer them a way to learn about music at home or in the car. Some of us are so familiar with the recent musical past that we don't know where the knowledge came from, but for many people the compact disc or download offers a rare opportunity to get invited into the musical process.

I've done a great many projects at the Library of Congress. For example, I played all the Bach solo violin works there. You can watch that entire concert on the library's website or on YouTube. I played five of the library's violins during a concert there. We have worked hard at creating pleasurable musical experiences. Each of the concerts offers a deeper contact with the music and a chance to learn about how it is played. That knowledge needs to be a part of people's education but it is no longer taught in public schools. As artists, we need to make it available to the public.

Q: When can I go to the movie theater and see you live in HD?

A: Symphonies and opera companies have bigger followings and they bring more people to theaters. We have not done it yet, but the Borromeo live in HD would be a fantastic idea. We could reach a much larger audience that way. Maybe we could give the audience a chance at a discussion. People would see the musicians and the music from different angles as it is being played. It would also offer us a chance to play for children for the first time. At a cinema you

can eat, drink, and even use the restroom if necessary. You don't have to worry about a restless child doing something that would send the concert into a tailspin.

Q: What can you tell me about the Schuller quartet?

A: As with a lot of great music, there is an introductory section. It leads to a very long melodic climb by the first violin over an immensely long sustained note by the cello. Schuller says that it could be one of the longest pedal tones in music. The cello just stays on that tone while the rest of us rise from one step to the next. Eventually you get this really rich apotheosis. Then, it becomes fragmented and the bits of music shuttle through the instruments in a quick expression. After that, there is one more rise, this time led by the cello, so it is sort of upside-down.

One of the most interesting aspects of the work is the frantic crazy energy of the second movement. Schuller calls it "flying shards." Not that it's threatening; it isn't. It's celebratory with a frenetic energy. Of course it's also very technical and very difficult. It's also very, very exciting. In that movement there is an area in the middle where he sets himself up to quote a very wonderful Mozart symphony. It's one that was written when Mozart was very young. Schuller also quotes Beethoven's Heiliger Dankgesang, from his opus 132, which he wrote at the end of his life. Schuller evokes a sense of contrast by the way these two quotes interact with each other. That, I find, is one of the most wonderful aspects of this piece. The third movement has a real grandeur in the way it sets up its rhythm and its powerful use of chords. In a certain way, it is ominous. The huge chords we play near the conclusion are quite amazing. Then the music disintegrates and in live performances we leave the stage allowing the cellist to play alone at the end. Schuller writes in 20th-century language and uses dissonant intervals, but he has a secure method of connecting with expressive content. Actually, he has a tremendous emotional richness in the way he communicates. Then he contrasts this romanticism with wild energetic textures. We play a lot of truly great older quartets like those of Beethoven, for example, but we start off with a piece like the Schuller. It's a thrill to discover that it, too, is a really great work. It's great in both imagination and emotional content. It's a piece that was written just a few years ago by Schuller, who is now in his 80s. He is still creating music and we can hope to play more of his works in the future.

Q: What can you tell me about Mohammed Fairouz?

A: He is very young. He is of Arab descent but he grew up in London. His musical training is from there. He is already quite brilliant at a young age. I think one of his main activities has been writing songs and working with singers. He has also written a number of symphonic works that are frequently performed. The piece we play has a very interesting way of bridging the gap between what is challenging and what is reassuring in an interesting and even enticing way. In Lamentation and Satire some of the Lamentation uses dissonance in a bold and almost furious manner. It is most expressive music, and at times it is really frenetic because it's constructed that way. But, then, he uses the quartet in a chorale mode. There are comforting intervals and harmonic sections that express a peaceful state. I love that aspect of his music. Then, of course, it turns and transforms itself into the Satire. There, again, we get a huge range of expression. He uses satire and extreme characters, much as Mahler does. Lamentation and Satire is not a long work, but it is most certainly one that we are excited to be able to put on our disc. Bartók, Schuller, and Fairouz are truly three successive generations of richly stimulating composers.

Q: What can you tell me about your recording of the Mendelssohn Octet together with the Arial Quartet?

A: The Arial Quartet was in the professional studies program here at the New England Conservatory, but they have since graduated. I got the manuscript of the Octet from the Library of Congress. It is on the computer, so I thought we might use that manuscript for a performance. Then I realized that the 1825 version was quite different from the published score. Mendelssohn had revised it with about a hundred bars of new music when he published it seven years after he first wrote it. We found that in the published version he had shortened the recapitulation of the first movement, omitting a beautiful theme that we had never played before. The first half of the development is basically different music in the original version. In the second movement he develops a repeated motif for 19 bars that does not appear in the published version. The third movement remains the same, but the fourth has some surprising dynamic changes. It makes sense that seven years later he was more experienced, so he streamlined the work.

Q: What can you tell us about the instruments that members of the quartet play?

A: I play on a wonderful violin that used to belong to my teacher at Curtis, Szymon Goldberg. It's a Guarneri del Gesù that Goldberg's widow, the pianist and educator Miyoko Golderg, gave to the Library of Congress with the proviso that I be able to use it as long as I play. I use it hoping to celebrate the spirit of his artistry and the generosity with which he taught that artistry. Before that, I played the A. J. Fletcher Stradivarius for many years. When the Goldberg opportunity came along I asked the Fletcher Foundation if the instrument could be used within the Borromeo Quartet. Now our second violinist, Kristopher Tong, plays it. It's wonderful to have both instruments playing here together. Mai Motobuchi has a viola from Moes & Moes. Yeesun Kim, the cellist, has a really old cello by Peregrino Zanetto that is labeled 1576. It was probably recut into the form of a modern cello during the 1700s.

Q: What is some of the music that has been written for you?

A: A number of works have been written for us. One interesting piece was composed in December of 2010; Curt Cacioppo has written a piece called Changing Woman. It is based on Navajo mythology. She is part of the Navajo way of understanding the world. It has a programmatic sense to it, but most importantly it's a vibrant piece of chamber music. We premiered it in Tucson and played it again at Taos last summer. Next year we will premiere a new work of Mohammed's, and we hope to commission a work by Mr. Schuller very soon.