

## The Verditas Quartet at laid-back BOP STOP (Jan. 25)

by Jarrett Hoffman



Twenty-some audience members mostly lined the bar. Soup and pretzel bites were eaten, and little kitchen clangs were heard. It might have been the most laid-back setting of any concert. And — not but — the music was excellent, as the Verditas Quartet thrilled Cleveland's BOP STOP Sunday night with quartets by Haydn, Beethoven, and Dvořák — and their own personality.

Most people didn't even realize the Verditas had entered the room when they did. The quartet's unassuming entrance preceded a strong performance of Haydn's "Emperor" Quartet, op. 76, no. 3. Yun-Tin Lee,

first violinist on the piece (he would switch places with Jeffrey Zehngut for the remainder of the concert), was an impressive interpretive leader, crafting cheeky pauses of perfect length and pacing the group through fresh phrasing. A lovely second-movement duet between the two violinists, both members of The Cleveland Orchestra, showed off their rapport.

Cellist Daniel Pereira seemed the heart and soul of the group. His expressive, at times atmospheric playing seemed to pull the group's heartbeats together. His crescendos had an extraordinary warmth.

Pereira also took up the mic, matching the lightness in the room with funny interludes. He introduced "the members of the band," who laughed at the tags they earned from him: "the one and only...our amazing...the famous..." When they returned from intermission to play Dvořák's "American Quartet," op. 96, he said, "It's a dream of ours to see the audience drinking while we play," adding, "we're a little jealous."

Some musicians move or flail while they play — you've probably seen it. Violist Amber Dimoff, the most stoic of the quartet in body language, was proof that visuals don't necessarily correlate with musicianship. She shined at the end of the first movement of Dvořák with a brave return of the main theme, and her dying gesture at the end of the second, so faint, was a perfect close.

Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 3 in D* showed off Zehngut's more extroverted first violin playing, perfectly suited to the work's surprises and drama— like one sudden halt in the first movement, and the piece's sixty-to-zero ending. The fourth movement delighted at the start, sporting plenty of steam. But as it went on, the group seemed to lose comfort amid the franticness.

They hadn't quite regained their mojo after intermission. The opening viola solo and a later cello solo in the Dvořák could have used more soloistic zip, while Zehngut's playing, though beautiful, missed some variety. No matter: the fourth movement seemed the cure. They saddled into a galloping groove, carrying the BOP STOP as listeners on high bar chairs wagged their feet along.

*Photo via the Verditas Quartet's Facebook page.*

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