

Maureen Choi Quartet at Bop Stop (June 20)

by Rory O'Donoghue



The Maureen Choi Quartet brought joyful energy to the Bop Stop stage during their concert on June 20, performing a fresh and fun set of works from their recent album *THEIA*.

First up was *Phoenix Borealis*, which began with a pensive piano intro and wistful ascending violin. Bop Stop director Gabe Pollack had cheekily introduced Choi, saying “I’ve never won an international violin competition, and she won one when she was 5!” She looked fully comfortable onstage, and her violin prowess was immediately apparent in her delicate phrasing. As the piece went on,

the group gained momentum, delving into a more boisterous groove. Particularly noticeable was the ascending line which built to an intense apex, driven by pianist Daniel García Diego and bassist Mario Carrillo. This number set the tone for the rest of the evening — unabashed fusion, drawing together jazz, flamenco, marches, and glimmers of classical.

“I wrote this for my mother,” Choi said before *Dance of the Fallen*. This was more of a lament, at times melancholy and at others a tad cinematic, but nonetheless a beautiful rhapsody before it doubled up in tempo. Andrés Litwin was on fire with an extended drum solo, navigating tricky metric modulations with panache. The doubling of the violin and piano in *Love is the Answer* gave it a sweet, almost childlike air.

Canto Salamanchino was another stylistic melting pot, pairing a phrygian groove with Piazzolla-esque moments and even delving into an extended Bach chorale-inspired violin cadenza. As Choi scrubbed away at the tricky fiddle music, the group was all smiles — their belief in the vitality of their music was infectious.

March-like snare returned along with a brusque violin line during *Dear Paco (Cepa Andaluza)*, a tribute to the flamenco superstar Paco de Lucía, which never lost its pep even after the rest of the group joined in. Diego contributed tasteful modal flair, and Choi drove into the abrupt ending with gusto.

Choi gave a quiet preface to *September, The First* — “This song is dedicated to loss.” The downtempo ballad began with Carrillo and Choi moving together in lines of simple beauty. The piece explores a solitary, repeated note swathed in minor harmony, and after another narrative arc that increased in intensity and then relaxed, Choi invited the audience to sing the melody with her. Though so many songs began, climaxed, and resolved similarly, each was a well-crafted journey over well-navigated terrain.

A unique arrangement of Manuel de Falla’s *Danza ritual del fuego* full of verve and flair made a rousing close to the Quartet’s set. All of the night’s selections were quite enjoyable, and each musician brought a different stylistic take to their improvised solos. Following hearty applause, they returned for an encore — *Bok Choi*, an entertaining mash-up of the Gigue from Bach’s *Partita No. 2* with the Maureen Choi Quartet’s signature, playful twist.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 1, 2019.

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