

Carpe Diem String Quartet Stays True to Its Name



KARINA WETHERBEE

Seizing the day, and improvising a career, is all in a day's work

By Corinne Ramey

IN THE DIMLY LIT BASEMENT of a club in New York's Greenwich Village, accompanied by the crunch of chips and the clinking of beer glasses, sits a string quartet. Dressed in jeans, the players make giant leaps from one genre to the next, first a Piazzolla tango, then a movement from Beethoven's Op. 95, and finally a fragment of a fiddle tune suite written by the quartet's violist. There's no printed program—the quartet's members take turns announcing the repertoire from the stage.

"I don't know if there's a rhyme or a reason to it, but we tend to play music that we love," first violinist Charles Wetherbee, who goes by Chas, tells the audience.

During this February performance at New York's trendy Le Poisson Rouge, a bar and concert venue that has hosted artists from cellist Zuill Bailey to the band They Might Be Giants, the music that the Carpe Diem String Quartet loves includes several movements of Beethoven, jazz by composer Bruce Wolosoff, a Shostakovich quartet, and the theme from *The Simpsons*.

The quartet—violinists Wetherbee and John Ewing, violist Korine Fujiwara, and cellist Diego Fainguersch—formed in 2004. The ensemble is now the resident string quartet at Ohio Wesleyan University, near Columbus, Ohio. In the past six years, it's emerged as a quartet known for innovative programming, unique

collaborations, and blurring the lines between genres. A regular collaborator with the Columbus Dance Theater, the quartet also has played programs that include art and video. The ensemble has collaborated with cellist Yo-Yo Ma, accordionist and bandoneonist Peter Soave, and klezmer clarinetist David Krakauer. In the past year, the quartet toured in New York, Chicago, Texas, Colorado, and Japan.

During a rehearsal break at a friend's New York apartment, the quartet's members, who range in age from 34 to 54, talk about everything from naming the quartet to playing video-game music. "You make it up as you go," Weatherbee says. "A lot of it is taking what you're doing and seeing if there's any interest in it."

The "making it up" process has included a cold e-mail to the record label Naxos, which eventually agreed to publish the complete string quartets of Russian composer Sergei Taneyev. The first CD has already been released, and all nine quartets will be recorded by 2012.