

DYNAMIC DUO – STRINGS&NOISE

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strings&noise (c) Maria Frodl
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Quick – name two composers associated with stringed instruments! If “Ablinger and Berio” weren’t your first answer, don’t worry – you’re with about 99% of the population. Ditto if you associate contemporary music with serious, black-clad people sitting quietly, rather than humor and dramatic interludes. Violinist Sophia Goidinger-Koch and cellist Barbara Riccabona – alias strings&noise – have made it their mission to change all that.

It’s a musician’s nightmare: you’re in a highly public place – such as, let’s say, the World Expo in Milan – playing a program of ultramodern, fiendishly difficult music...and your grandmother is in the front row, watching with a look of utter bewilderment on her face. That’s exactly what happened to violinist Sophia Goidinger-Koch...and then she had a revelation: “Later,” she says, “we were standing in a museum, looking at a totally abstract picture by a contemporary artist. My grandmother paints watercolors, and she loved it. I explained to her that the picture was the same as my music, and I realized at that moment that people can close their eyes, but not their ears. Hearing goes much deeper than seeing.”

EXTRA MUSICAL

That may not have been her direct motivation to found strings&noise in 2015 (at the time with cellist Maiken Beer), but it surely gave her a strong push. The duo’s name is based on a 30-second piece by composer Peter Ablinger called “Two Strings and Noise” – a title which also serves as a fair description of the piece itself. And the performative aspect? Cellist Barbara Riccabona explains: “We like to include dramatic scenes, working in the gray area between acting and playing music. Connecting the two creates a new character for the concerts – you can build wonderful dramatic arcs, tell stories.” That, in the view of strings&noise, is the key to winning new fans for their music: “The approach works via the extramusical elements.”



Video: strings&noise – CrossRoads Trailer

The duo was selected in 2020 as a NASOM artist, normally both a signal honor for an Austrian act and a huge stepping stone to the international market...but 2020, obviously, was no normal year. “It’s difficult to pick up where we left off before the pandemic,” says Sophia Goidinger-Koch. “A lot of venues or promoters don’t exist anymore, or they have a lot less money to work with.” “And the lines of musicians at their door are long,” adds Barbara Riccabona.

Still, they’re optimistic about the future, and (among other activities this summer) they’ve garnered a spot at the renowned impuls Festival in Graz on July 25th. Whatever the case, they’ll continue serving up works by composers like Caitlin Smith, Alexander Kaiser, and Bernhard Lang with imagination and humor. “It’s so important to meet the audience halfway,” says Sophia Goidinger-Koch, “to try to empathize and understand that not everyone has the time and interest to deal with it every day.”

Philip Yaeger

LINKS

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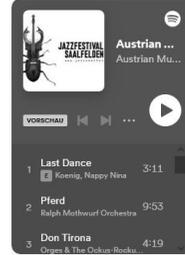
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