

MUSIC REVIEW

Parisii Quartet kicks up the verve

The group shows off its confidence, passion and emotion in an unconventional program of difficult pieces.

By RICHARD S. GINELL
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This year, the Parisii Quartet is marking a milestone — two decades of serving up string quartet music from the 18th to the 21st centuries. But you'd have had to deduce that from the printed bio distributed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, for no fuss was made about it as the group gave a Monday Evening Concerts recital in the Bing Theater.

Nor was this a conventional touring program by any means, for the Parisii foursome — Arnaud Vallin and Jean-Michel Berrette (violins), Dominique Lobet (viola) and Jean-Philippe Martignoni (cello) — arrived

with three difficult works from a veteran French composer-conductor and two younger Portuguese-born colleagues, none of them particularly well-known in the U.S.

The Parisii clearly trusted the audience — and they made their case with plenty of verve, thrust, technical security and evident emotional commitment.

The most interesting piece on the program came from the youngest composer, Pedro Amaral, 31, currently in residence at the new-music laboratory IRCAM in Paris and bent on "reinventing" the string quartet form. His Quartet No. 1 (2003) opens with busy, churning agitation — and you think, "Himm, Elliott Carter revisited" — yet suddenly the music plunges into an abyss of weird stillness and moves back and forth through five different tempos, ending with a quiet sustained passage in which the string instruments sound almost like horns.

Although Amaral's description of what he was doing came off as technical babble, he did

provide a useful graphic road map of the piece as a handout for the audience that made its complicated form quite clear.

Amaral's teacher at the Paris Conservatory and colleague at IRCAM, Emmanuel Nunes, provided the next piece, "Chessed III," which lurched about asymmetrically and often repetitively before coming to an abrupt halt.

Like Amaral, Nunes hails from Lisbon — but as in the former's piece, if there was any hint of national flavor in Nunes' highly cerebral 13-minute quartet, it went undetected on a first hearing.

Gilbert Amy, once a protégé of Pierre Boulez — he even succeeded Boulez as director of the now-defunct Domaine Musical concerts in Paris — was represented third with his large-scale Quartet No. 1 from 1992.

Lasting more than half an hour — and not without a few listlessly drifting patches — the work generated some satisfying drive in stretches. One muted passage recalled an episode in Berg's "Lyric Suite."