



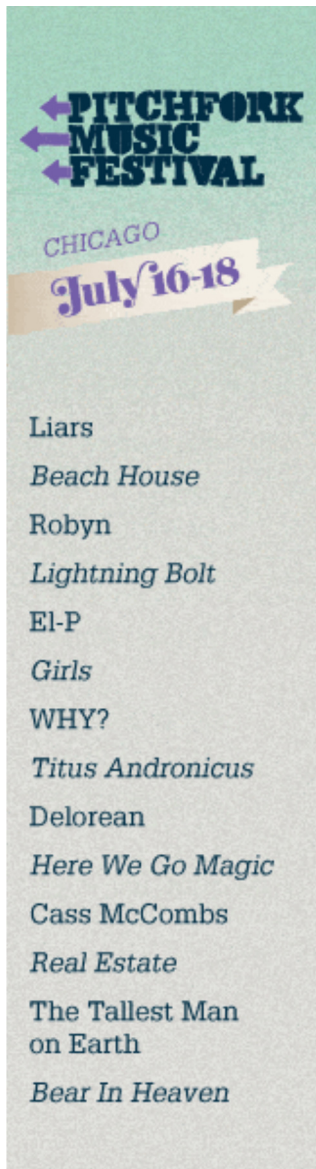
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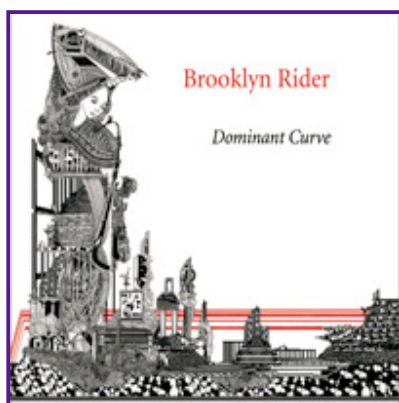
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## Album Review



### Brooklyn Rider Dominant Curve

[In a Circle; 2010]

7.5

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The string quartet Brooklyn Rider is still relatively new-- they released their first recording on their own in 2008 after working with Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble-- but they are making a name for themselves. For this kind of group, an easy way with both old and new, composed and improvised, is essential, and Brooklyn Rider has it. On *Dominant Curve*, they've chosen to unify the album thematically more than musically, and they focus on

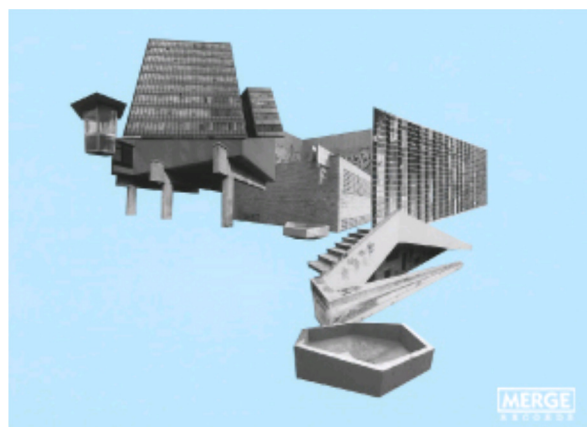
exploring how the ideas of French composer Claude Debussy, who lived from 1862 to 1918, have traveled forward through music to the modern day. To that end, they've chosen to perform Debussy's own "String Quartet in G Minor", and Rider violinist Colin Jacobsen has composed his own four-movement quartet titled "Achilles' Heel" (Debussy's given name was Achille-Claude), which effectively explores similar rhythmic and harmonic concepts to the Debussy piece. The quartet also commissioned original compositions from Japan's Kojiro Umezaki, Uzbekistan's Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky, and American Justin Messina that explore some of those same ideas in very different ways.

The reading of the old Debussy piece, originally written in 1893, is intense and lively, full of sharp dynamic shifts and subtly virtuoso playing that imparts amazing tonal and textural variety to the score. The third movement in particular is gorgeously ethereal. This piece is a natural choice for the group. When Debussy composed it, he was just embarking on his most celebrated phase, in which he became keenly interested in modal harmony, unusual scales and sound combinations, and ethnic music from outside Europe, including Indonesian gamelan, which informed some of his rhythmic ideas. Brooklyn Rider have built their repertoire on a restless interest in synthesizing global sounds and Western classical music. Jacobsen's piece, written to act as something of a descendant of "String Quartet in G Minor", also uses modal composition and shares some arranging sensibilities with its predecessor, making extensive use of pizzicato playing, rhythmic patterns, and non-standard bowing techniques-- the second movement is especially dramatic.

The other pieces are steps further removed from Debussy but still share elements with his "String Quartet"-- notably the modal harmonic structures and tendency to call on the players to use odd techniques. Umezaki joins the quartet, playing a traditional Japanese wood flute called a shakuhachi-- his "Cycles (What Falls Must Rise)" is a textural piece that incorporates electronic manipulation. Messina also joins the quartet, controlling electronics on his own string quartet arrangement of John Cage's 1948 composition "In a Landscape", which was originally intended for piano or harp. It's a haunting piece to begin with, but this version, with its emphasis on high, sustained violin tones can make the hair stand up on your neck. It's Yanov-Yanovsky's "...Al Niente" that also strives for the drama inherent to Debussy's work, creating a harmonic smear that full-bodied violin runs can leap out of at its beginning and proceeding through odd rippling passages to a quiet and long decay.

*Dominant Curve* succeeds in its attempt to bridge a classic work of a great composer with the work of that composer's stylistic descendants. Debussy's music and ideas still hold a lot of creative possibilities today. In performing the work of the man himself, Brooklyn Rider bring the "String Quartet in G Minor" vividly to life. On surrounding pieces, they extend invitations to listeners of modern minimalism and post-rock. With more work like this, Brooklyn Rider seem poised to earn attention on their own terms-- regardless of which composers they work with.

— [Joe Tangari](#), June 1, 2010



Teenage Fanclub

Shadows

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