

## Music and Magic in Moritzburg 2011

by Laurence Vittes  
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When I visited the charming town of Moritzburg in southeastern Germany last year, I was taken with its charm and timeless sense of beauty. Embraced by nature, Moritzburg exists in a surreal time warp, 10 miles south of Dresden, for whose kings its magnificent palace once served as a royal hunting lodge.

It would be an ideal destination place, and a jewel in the crown of what the marketing folks call *Elbland* for its proximity to the great river which runs through Saxony on its way to North Sea, without even one note being struck. With the annual August presence of Jan Vogler's Moritzburg Festival and Academy, Moritzburg has become a place for music lovers to refresh their souls.

The star power is as amazing as the setting. Just to name a few: Violinists Nicola Benedetti (still only 22 and beginning to flower), Mira Wang (Vogler's wife, with two adorable young daughters in tow), the brilliant young New Yorker Philippe Quint, Arnaud Sussmann (whose recording of Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* at the Menlo Park festival remains a touchstone for greatness) and the legendary stylist and technician Benjamin Schmid (whose every note and gesture is a model of classical music purity and musical intoxication).

Also on hand were violists Niels Mönkemeyer (a superstar for Sony although his CDs have yet to reach North American shores) and Max Mandel (of the Flux Quartet whose premiere performance of Morton Feldman's Second String Quartet lasted six hours and fifteen minutes); cellists Julian Steckel and Eric Han (both stars of the future); double bassist Janne Saksala (solo double bass of the Berlin Philharmonic); and virtuoso pianists Andreas Haefliger (whose risk-taking artistry was a constant revelation) and Antti Siirala (whose work in a variety of combinations was breathtaking).

It was no surprise that the Festival this year began with a concert at Volkswagen's *Transparent Factory* in Dresden. The world's third largest car maker's presence was notable not only for its comprehensive support of the arts but for the seemingly omnipresent presence of their ultra-high end Phaetons, produced exclusively in Dresden for potentates the world over, actual and potential, who recognize its superb dynamic qualities and appreciate its sumptuous fittings and state of the art Dynaudio sound systems.



Moritzburg Castle

I arrived a week ago in time to hear a series of deeply moving performances in a variety of venues, loosely unified by a British theme, including Benjamin Britten's *3 Divertimenti* for string quartet, John Taverner's 43-minute long paean to mysticism and Christian orthodoxy, *The Protecting Veil* (played in the famous Frauenkirche in Dresden by the Academy orchestra conducted by Anu Tali with Vogler lending incomparable humanity and endurance on a "new" Strad), a brilliant reading of Schubert's *Trout Quintet* (newly recorded as well) and a ferocious one of Dvorak's Op. 81 *Piano Quintet* in the palace itself.

This year, the Festival's Academy welcomed 40 young music students from all over the world. Like the Marlboro Festival in Vermont, which inspired Vogler, music and friendships in Moritzburg blossom, like any summer camp. And what a fantasy classical music experience the Festival was for the adults!