

Review**Linden String Quartet with Arthur Rowe:
beginning a new series at Reinberger Chamber Hall (April 2)**

by Mike Telin



What if you gave a concert and nobody came? “We were all having [nightmares] about this,” violinist Sarah McElravy nervously confessed to a near-capacity audience who had gathered in Reinberger Hall at Severance Hall on Tuesday, April 2. The occasion was the inaugural concert of the Linden String Quartet’s own Parallels Cleveland Chamber Music Series which featured the music of Haydn, Bolcom and Schumann.

Founded in the spring of 2008 at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Linden Quartet (violinists Sarah McElravy and Catherine Cosbey, violist Eric Wong and cellist Felix Umansky) have quickly established an impressive reputation on the national and international chamber music circuit.

After winning the Gold Medal and Grand Prize of the 2009 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, they were awarded the Coleman-Barstow Prize at the Coleman National Chamber Ensemble Competition that same year. In 2010, they earned First Prize at the 2010 Hugo Kauder Competition, and most recently, the ProQuartet Prize at the 9th Borciani International String Quartet Competition. The quartet recently completed a two-year Graduate String-Quartet-in-Residence program at Yale where they were mentored by the Tokyo String Quartet.

For those of us who remember the Linden Quartet in their formative years, in addition to being extremely talented musicians, we will also remember them as an ensemble that was committed to community — they were early adapters of the “let’s take chamber music to the people” mentality. It is this mentality that led the quartet to the decision to make Cleveland their home and to create their own series. And if Tuesday’s concert is any indication of things to come, Parallels Cleveland has a very bright future. Musically speaking, the evening was as close to perfect as anyone could have hoped for, and the somewhat rowdy crowd who had no problem with clapping between movements was a breath of fresh air.

A new string quartet series had to begin with a work by Haydn, the father of the string quartet. The Lindens were perfectly marvelous during the *Quartet in D Major, Op. 76 no.*

5. Performing with energy, wit and spot-on intonation, even the quietest moments projected warmly in Reinberger Hall's acoustics.

Originally written for piano, American composer William Bolcom's *Three Rags* have become some of his most beloved works. *Poltergeist*, *Graceful Ghost* and *Incineratorag* are a pleasure to hear in any arrangement, and the 1989 version for string quartet is no exception. The quartet made the most of the evil-sounding, *Poltergeist*. Cellist Felix Uman-sky's solo during *Graceful Ghost* was sublime and *Incineratorag* was pure fun.



Because of a minor accident forcing the withdrawal of violinist William Preucil, the originally scheduled *Concerto for Piano, Violin and String Quartet* by Chausson needed to be replaced. But luckily, the outstanding Canadian pianist Arthur Rowe was still able to join forces with the Lindens for a mesmerizing performance of Robert Schumann's *Piano Quintet in E-Flat Major, Op. 44* (the first composition ever written for this combination of instruments).

Like the Lindens, Rowe possesses impeccable technique along with keen musical sensibilities that allowed him to seamlessly transition from a supportive to solo musical role. From beginning to end, this performance was chamber music at its best. The opening *Allegro brillante* was beautifully paced, never bogging down but rather ebbing and flowing naturally with the melodic line. The *Scherzo: Molto vivace* never became blurred and the final *Allegro ma non troppo* was brilliant.

It will be interesting to see where the Lindens take their series in the future — they mentioned some very interesting ideas in the program that combine music with poetry, dance and visual art. Oh, and as far as applauding between movements, if people are moved by what the performer(s) are doing, they should feel free to show their appreciation!

I certainly look forward to the second season which includes guest appearances by pianist Peter Frankl and the Cavani Quartet, the premiere of a work by composer Joseph Hallman and the rescheduled performance of the Chausson with William Preucil and Arthur Rowe.

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