

Review

Omni Quartet at LCCC (April 7)

by Guytano Parks



Lorain County Community College's Signature Series of 2013-14 ended on a brilliant note with a performance by the Omni Quartet on Monday evening, April 7. The quartet was established five years ago and is comprised of violinists Amy Lee and Alicia Koelz, violist Joanna Patterson Zakany and cellist Tanya Ell, all members of The Cleveland Orchestra. Their program consisted of Mendelssohn's Quartet No. 2 in a, op. 13 and Beethoven's Quartet No. 15 in a, op. 132.

Tanya Ell's brief introductory commentary offered enlightening comparisons between the two works, and the musicians played excerpts to illustrate the similarities and influences, revealing Mendelssohn's deep reverence for Beethoven and his fascination with the late a minor quartet. The title of his song *Ist es war?* (*Is it true?*, op. 9, no. 1) is written into the score and it forms the motif of the opening *Adagio*, appearing in all four movements. Similarly, Beethoven wrote the title of his song *Muss es sein?* (*Must it be?*) into the score of op. 132.

The Omni Quartet's performance of Mendelssohn's a minor Quartet (written during his teen years) was a model of perfection, teeming with flawless intonation, impeccable ensemble and interpretive taste and intelligence. The first movement's opening *Adagio* and the second movement *Adagio non lento* probed expressive depths while the *Allegro vivace* section of the first movement as well as the third movement *Intermezzo* had a lightness and character reminiscent of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The second movement's central fugal section, with its progression of variations (modeled after the fugal section of the slow movement of Beethoven's op. 95 quartet), was superb.

All of the musicians had individual moments in the musical spotlight, and the last movement's opening first violin cadenza afforded such an opportunity for Koelz. This dramatic and expressive declamation was contrasted by fleet and precise execution by all, propelled by Ell's playing of the driving and passionate cello part.

Beethoven's Quartet No. 15 begins with the cello playing a slow motif, gradually growing from silence. A sporadic reoccurrence of the motif throughout with great disruptions and variances in textures and tonalities all within a dark and mournful character distinguish this movement. An extended lyrical theme does appear, and was presented expressively

by a different solo voice each time it returned. The players handled every twist and turn expertly, making the music sound fresh, alive and spontaneous here, and in the second movement, which was rife with arresting accents, hemiolas, and surging unisons.

The third movement finds Beethoven with great profundity and specificity, inscribing into the score: "A Convalescent's Holy song of Thanksgiving to the Deity, in the Lydian Mode." This movement forms the sublime centerpiece of the work. Sounding like an otherworldly instrument weightlessly hovering in the air, the quartet delivered a near-vibratoless blend of sound with exemplary accuracy of intonation. The moments when this hovering entity lit to the ground in a frolic of song and dance were joyously played.

The brief march was jaunty as the quartet marked the dotted rhythms deliberately, leading directly into the finale. Lee assumed the role of first violin in the Beethoven, and had a turn at a stunning declamatory solo, akin to that of Koelz in the Mendelssohn. Ell was at the helm for the most part during the *strum und drang* of this final movement, leading through the bold transitions and digressions with a secure grasp, benefitting from Zakany's rich and resonant viola playing. The coda included a typical surprise repose in a major tonality just before the conclusion.

Stocker Arts Center-Studio Theatre is a smallish, black box with no frills but acoustically very satisfactory, with the dark starkness focusing full attention on the immediacy and intimacy of the performance. The appreciative audience responded with hearty applause. Hopefully the Signature Series at LCCC will continue with many more chamber music performances of this high quality in the coming seasons.

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