

Cleveland Chamber Music Society: catching up with the Jupiter Quartet

by Mike Telin



Since their founding thirteen years ago, the Jupiter Quartet (violinists Nelson Lee and Meg Freivogel, violist Liz Freivogel, and cellist Daniel McDonough) has presented concerts across North America, Europe, and Asia, and have garnered numerous chamber music awards including the Cleveland Quartet Award from Chamber Music America, first prize in the Banff International String Quartet Competition, and grand prize in

the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition. In 2008 they were awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

The [Jupiter Quartet](#) will return to Cleveland on Tuesday, December 1 at 7:30 pm for a concert at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights presented by the [Cleveland Chamber Music Society](#). The program will feature works by Joseph Haydn, Henri Dutilleux, and Ludwig van Beethoven. A pre-concert lecture by Rabbi Roger Klein will begin at 6:30 pm.

“We’re excited to be coming back. It’s been a while since we’ve been in the Cleveland area,” first violinist Nelson Lee said during a telephone conversation. We were just in Napa Valley playing on a chamber music series and performing a lot of outreach concerts in schools and around the community.”

The Jupiters are currently in their fourth year as quartet-in-residence at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. Lee said that he and his quartet colleagues are enjoying everything they’re doing and are fortunate to be able to combine concertizing with teaching. “We’re also part of the string faculty so we each have private students along

with running the chamber music program. One of the big perks of the position is that we get to perform in the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts three times each year. It's a really nice space."

Next Tuesday's program is something of a homecoming: Nelson, Meg, and Daniel are all graduates of the Cleveland Institute of Music, and Liz is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory, where the group served as visiting quartet-in-residence for two academic years. "Although we formed the Jupiter later, I worked with Dan and Meg for the two years I was at CIM," Nelson said. "It was an amazing experience and it cultivated my love for chamber music. I participated in the school's Intensive String Quartet Seminar with the Cavani Quartet, and that experience was the reason I wanted to try to pursue it as a career. The Cavani's enthusiasm for chamber music is infectious."

While in Cleveland, the Jupiters will conduct a master class on Monday, November 30 at 4:00 pm in CIM's Mixon Hall. A "Lives in Music" career seminar will follow. Both events are presented as part of CIM's Chamber Music Festival.

Regarding their CCMS program, Lee pointed out that they wanted to pair Haydn's *Quartet in B-flat*, Op. 76, No. 4 with Dutilleux's *Ainsi la nuit* on the first half because they create totally opposite atmospheres. "The Haydn 'Sunrise' quartet does evoke a sense of optimism. The nickname is not something that Haydn coined — it was a publisher's idea — but there is a brightness about the work that is appealing. We are contrasting that brightness with Dutilleux's *Ainsi la nuit* (*Thus the Night*), which paints musical portraits of night.

"Beethoven's *Quartet in e*, Op. 59, No. 2 also has a connection to the night. The opening of the second movement reflects Beethoven's philosophizing about a starry night sky. He's sort of contemplating the universe. We think the three pieces make a nice program." The theme of the concert is also fitting because the quartet chose its name in part because Jupiter is the most prominent planet in the night sky.

While most chamber music audiences are familiar with the quartets of Haydn and Beethoven, French composer Henri Dutilleux's only quartet is often neglected on chamber music programs, a fact that Lee finds troubling. "I think it's very colorful, and he's able to draw unique and vivid sounds from the quartet, especially with his use of extended techniques. There's a lot of *pizzicato*, *sul ponticello* (playing with the bow near the bridge), and *col legno* (using the wood of the bow to make a percussive sound). He also uses *sul tasto* (playing with the bow over the fingerboard). It's not a melodic piece by any means, but it's full of different colors and atmospheres that are hauntingly beautiful at times, and disturbingly shocking at others."

Reflecting on the Jupiter's thirteen years as a quartet, Lee believes that it has been the group's ability to "stick together through all of the ups and downs" that has been key to their success. "Finding commonality among us helps to strengthen our relationships both musically and personally. Every group is a work in progress. The thing that we all enjoy is the flexibility that we have — getting to do different things like playing formal concerts, giving master classes, and going into the community, which is something we've been doing ever since we formed the group. It's also something the Cavani Quartet inspired in us. I remember seeing them do an outreach program when I was a student and it just blew my mind. We are lucky to have a situation like theirs here at Illinois. Having a stable base and being able to develop a community here in terms of the audience, students, and colleagues is very nice. We're enjoying it all very much."

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