

Cleveland Chamber Music Society: Jupiter Quartet at Plymouth Church (December 1)

by Daniel Hathaway



In the grand scheme of chamber music, a group that is only beginning its 14th season as an ensemble is still in its adolescence. Young though the Jupiter Quartet may be, their energy, enthusiasm, and technical prowess put them head to head with established chamber music groups who have developed the fine patina that only many years of playing together can buff to a fine sheen.

As the Jupiters' bio points out, the quartet is "a particularly intimate group, consisting of violinists Nelson Lee and Meg Freivogel, violist Liz Freivogel (older sister of Meg), and cellist Daniel McDonough (husband of Meg, brother-in-law of Liz)." Those relationships by blood or marriage — we hope Nelson Lee doesn't feel left out — account for much of the keen communication the players demonstrated in their opening work on the Cleveland Chamber Music Society series at Plymouth Church on Tuesday, December 1.

From the very beginning of Joseph Haydn's *Quartet in B-flat*, Op. 76, No. 4, dubbed the "Sunrise" on account of the initial rising line in the first violin, the Jupiters established a tight feeling of ensemble with abundant eye contact, traded smiles, and expressive hair tossing on the part of Meg Freivogel. Their playing was exuberant and fun to watch. As the mood turned more somber in the Adagio, the Jupiters intensified their tone and altered their color. Expertly managing the two upticks in tempo in the finale, the players also ratcheted up the excitement, bringing the quartet to a breathless conclusion.

The Haydn served as an overture to the main event of the evening, Henri Dutilleux's striking and mysterious *Ainsi la nuit*, the 20th-century French composer's meditations on

nighttime. Its seven movements, with their evocative titles (Nocturne, Miroir d'espace, Litanies, Constellations, Temps suspendu) flow together and conjure up a range of colors that is astonishing, considering that the subject really has to do with the absence of light.

The Jupiters have made *Ainsi la nuit* something of a calling card, and the players have an inside track on its interpretation, having enjoyed the opportunity to play it for the composer, as McDonough mentioned in his spoken remarks.

Their performance was entirely riveting, but especially in the obsessive Litanies 1 & 2. Dutilleux demands some extraordinary effects during his musico-philosophical discourse on night and the universe, and the Jupiters handily delivered the goods in every case.

The program ended with the second of Ludwig van Beethoven's "Razumovsky" quartets, Op. 59, No. 2 in e, a middle-period work that has one foot in the world of Haydn and Mozart and the other in a future where the composer would atomize his themes more and more into tiny building blocks — musical legos to be assembled into highly integrated structures.

In the course of the quartet the Jupiters distinguished themselves in fine, wide dynamic contrasts and tight, thrilling rhythms — especially so in the finale, which hurtled its way to a stirring conclusion. The quartet declined the invitation to play an encore, wisely leaving Beethoven with the last word.

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