

ENCORE Chamber Music: a conversation with the Miró Quartet's Daniel Ching

by Mike Telin



“We had our roots right there in Northeast Ohio, so coming back to play is always a special thing for us,” Miró Quartet first violinist Daniel Ching said during a recent interview. “This time is extra special because we’ll be working with young players, so it brings back memories of when we were just starting out.”

On Saturday, June 18 at 8:00 pm in Gilmour Academy’s Our Lady Chapel, the [Miró Quartet](#), Daniel Ching and William Fedkenheuer, violins, John Largess, viola, and Joshua Gindele, cello, will present the Opening Night Celebration of the inaugural ENCORE Chamber Music Institute. The program will feature works by Haydn, Beethoven, and Brahms.

The Miró will open their program with the *Quartet in D*, Op. 20, No. 4 of Haydn, a composer that Ching said takes him back to the group’s beginnings at the Oberlin Conservatory, and their very first mentor. “Greg Fulkerson just pounded into our being that Haydn is the staple of the quartet literature, especially in terms of creating a collective voice,” Ching recalled. “We played a lot of Haydn during our formative years. And still today we’re always amazed at how simple yet clever his music is.”

The Quartet’s program will continue with a work they’ve been playing for over twenty years, Beethoven’s *Quartet in f*, Op. 95. “I think this is his shortest quartet, but in some ways it is the most dense and emotionally compact. The first movement is only about four minutes long, but when you’re done you feel like you’ve been playing for twenty minutes.”

They'll conclude with another work from their early years, Brahms's *Quartet in c*, Op. 51, No. 1. "Brahms spent a lot of time trying to write a quartet before he actually did, and he burned a lot of half-completed compositions that he didn't think were good enough. He was such a perfectionist and had the unfortunate title of being the successor to Beethoven. That plagued him his entire life."

At the time of our conversation, Ching noted that the Miró was just finishing up a four-week break, something that over time they have realized is "very necessary." Another important aspect of quartet playing, Ching said, is working through your differences. "What we learned early on — and I think it's the same for any quartet — is dealing with member dynamics. At the beginning I would say that we spent 60 to 70 percent of our energy figuring out how we were going to work together. It paid off for us later, as we were able to maintain a steady membership because of that. And when we did bring in a new member five years ago, he was able to fit in well, simply because we had laid that foundation."

After Oberlin the Miró spent time learning to play from a single mind when they studied with members of the famed Cleveland Quartet on the other side of town, at CIM. "Don Weilerstein, Peter Salaff, and Paul Katz — they were all mentors of ours. We saw how they worked together, and we realized that they went through the same things we did," Ching pointed out. "The Guarneri was a big role model in that they were four people who were so different from one another but somehow managed to create one thing. We really modeled ourselves after those two groups, with a hint of Juilliard and Emerson, but they were all influences. The opportunity to sit down with all of them and to get to know them as people taught us a lot."

Ching said that because of those experiences, they try not to be faceless teachers but rather show themselves as people to their students. "I think it's good for them to see that we are four strong personalities who make it work through tough times. It does give the students comfort that they are not the only ones who have problems to work through. And conversations about things like that are often times more engaging and more important than just talking about the music."

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 14, 2016.

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