

Cavani Quartet at ENCORE Chamber Music (June 23)

by Samantha Spaccasi



“The Cavani Quartet is the heart and soul of ENCORE Chamber Music,” festival director Jinjoo Cho said before the group’s performance Friday night at the Gilmour Academy’s Tudor House. The Quartet proved why they are beloved during enjoyable performances of Shostakovich, Joaquín Turina, and Schubert.

Before the program began, the Cavani invited the audience to join in wishing

one of the festival’s cello students a happy birthday, playing “The Birthday Song.” It was a sweet moment that showed why the group has such a strong connection with ENCORE.

Beginning with Shostakovich’s *String Quartet No. 1 in C*, the Cavani showcased great communication, never disconnected from each other or the music. From the outset, the Quartet blended well and let each player shine. Guest cellist Felix Umansky sounded rich and warm, knowing where to articulate the most poignant passages. He demonstrated his artistry without overpowering the rest of the group. The dynamic violist Eric Wong played with creative phrasing, mystery, and an excellent sense of the eerie. The entire Quartet illustrated the piece’s many emotions with color, resulting in a thrilling interpretation.

The Cavani returned for Turina’s *La oración del torero*. The piece juxtaposes the serenity of the chapel and frenzy of the bullfighting crowd, and the Quartet captured these two moods beautifully. Although first violinist Annie Fullard struggled with intonation and occasionally sounded thin in the beginning, this improved as the performance progressed. Second violinist Mari Soto complemented her partners well,

playing with precision and flair. The Cavani's transitions were seamless. At the end, it sounded as if the group were prayerfully sending the soft, dulcet tones to the heavens.

What was at first a disappointing program change turned out to be welcome. The Cavani were originally scheduled to perform Shostakovich's Eighth Quartet, but announced that the work would be replaced by Schubert's Quartet No. 14 ("Death and the Maiden"). Thanks to the skillful performance, for the first time in my life I enjoyed hearing a work by the Austrian composer. Playing with energy and style, and alternating from the pastoral to the dramatic, the group brought out the work's many voices with clarity. The highlight of the evening was the tarantella. The Cavani exploded with passion, filling the small room with an enormous, lush sound.

The audience erupted with applause and the Quartet topped off the evening with the fun, jazzy "Midnight Child" by Charles Washington.

Photo: Robert Muller

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