

ENCORE Chamber Music at CIM's Mixon Hall (July 9)

by Robert Rollin

On Sunday afternoon, July 9, Encore Chamber Music opened its Mixon Hall program with an exceptional performance of Kevin Puts' one-movement *Dark Vigil* for string quartet. Violinist Jinjoo Cho led the group with flair in its powerful dissonant counterpoint, relieved periodically by unisons.

Cho's ominous low-register solos reflected the dark subject matter inspired by 1999 news footage of a Midwest high school staging a student shooting incident against such an eventuality. Her contrasting high-register solos shrieked above the pulsating motion and surging crescendos.

The work depicts a struggle to comprehend the capacity of America's teens to commit such acts, and in a broader sense, the struggle between innocence and depravity.

Cho and violist Jan Grüning doubled one another in a beautiful flautando-bowed passage. This sustained music served as a memorial to those who lost their lives in such incidents. Grüning and cellist Amit Even-Tov each had several strongly expressive solos that penetrated the more gentle music. Second violinist Joseph Kromholz played delicate harmonics to support Cho's plaintive low solos.

The performers' intense focus kept the audience riveted, and softer closing sections reflected a spiritual transcendence experienced by those forced to come to terms with personal loss.

A fine performance of Antonin Dvořák's *Piano Quintet No 2 in A, Op. 81*, invigorated the audience. Pianist Hyun Soo Kim played with remarkable sensitivity and impeccable technique throughout. Mindy Park spun out the opening cello solo with great expression against arpeggio piano chords. Violist Yu Jin's second theme solo scintillated.

Kim exposed the second movement's moody dumka theme with melancholic grace.

His solos were equally beautiful following the bright interlude. Cho and the entire ensemble performed the frenzied, almost schizophrenic main theme recurrence with perfect ensemble.

The Scherzo-Furiant's trio section had some especially attractive rhythmic nuances, and the lively final Allegro sparkled, fading away to Kim's final introspective piano gesture.

William Bolcom's *Three Rags for String Quartet* received excellent performances. He first wrote the pieces for piano solo, the original medium for ragtime in the dives and brothels of New Orleans. They rarely translate well to strings, but the quartet's fine pacing and attention to detail produced captivating results.

First violin Arianna Dotto, second violin Rachel Sandman, and violist Yu Jin, all had fine solos in *Poltergeist*. Dotto's high register tone was gorgeous. The group executed the imaginative stop-and-start phrasings precisely and in properly syncopated ragtime.

The ever-popular *Graceful Ghost* first appeared on Bolcom's and Bill Albright's 1960s Nonesuch piano disc. The quartet's phrasing, expression, and balance were appropriately light, and cellist Stella Cho's solos were especially appealing. *Incinerator* contrasted *Graceful Ghost's* wistful style with a livelier and more raucous mood. Jin's lovely solo, her attractive doubled paring with Cho, and the group's wonderful final accelerando were uplifting highlights.

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