

## Cavani String Quartet to perform at Happy Days in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (Part One)

by Mike Telin



When two longtime members of a string quartet decide to leave the ensemble, the remaining musicians have to ask themselves what to do next.

The Tokyo Quartet elected to disband, but after violist Kirsten Docter and cellist Merry Peckham moved on

from the Cavani String Quartet to pursue new professional opportunities, violinists Annie Fullard and Mari Sato decided that the Cavani should live on. “We did ask ourselves that question,” Sato said, “but the quartet repertoire is so rich and we love working with students, so we quickly decided that, yes, we need to move forward.”

On Tuesday, August 22 at 7:00 pm at the happy Days Lodge in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, the Cavani Quartet will present their first local performance with new members violist Eric Wong and cellist Si-Yan Li.

“Excitement doesn’t even begin to describe the feeling that I have,” Fullard said, “there are so many emotions that go through you when you make transitions. But I adore Mari and my new colleagues. Si-Yan has an incredible attitude and spirit and Eric is a brilliant musician — he’s a thinker. And it’s so stimulating to work with people who bring those attributes into a group in addition to being great instrumentalists.”

“All of the stars aligned for us when it came to finding Eric,” Sato said. “We’ve known him since he was in high school, and he went on to earn two degrees in violin at CIM, where he also studied viola with Kirsten. It felt right to have that connection with him through her.”

Prior to joining the Cavani Quartet in 2016, Wong was a member of the Afiara and Linden string quartets, during which time he gained professional quartet performance and teaching experience. What were his thoughts when he was asked to join the group? “I was in shock,” Wong said. “Being a member of the Cavani and teaching at CIM is truly a dream job, so saying yes was a pretty easy answer for me. And replacing Kirsten is very special for me. I’ve always respected her so much — she was one of the first violists that I looked up to — and I’m honored to be trying to fill her shoes.”

Sato, who has been a member of the Cavani Quartet for 22 years, said that finding a new cellist took a little more time. “Peter Salaff had worked with Si-Yan at Music Academy of the West and highly recommended him. Si-Yan has great positive energy on and off the stage. He was a member of the Euclid Quartet for seven years, so, like Eric, he knows and loves the string quartet repertoire. He is also a terrific teacher.”

Although Si-Yan Li did not know Fullard, Sato, and Wong prior to the audition process, he is inspired by their musicianship and their dedication to mentoring young musicians. “They are wonderful people,” Li said. “I’ve never seen anyone like Annie and Mari, and watching them teaching the younger generation of musicians, is just incredible. They’re very nice and funny people and from day one it was easy to talk to them all.”

Li added that being a member of Cavani will give him the opportunity to help the next generation carry on the string quartet tradition. “I was lucky as a student because my teachers were very kind and dedicated to me, and I feel like it is now time to give back.”

Although this is an exciting time, for Fullard it is also a time for reflection. “The original foursome — Susan, Erika, Merry, and I had so many adventures together — and we were lucky enough to continue into the second and third decades, when Mari and Kirsten joined the group. During those three decades, there has been so much love and so much laughter. I credit all of my colleagues with being some of the most thoughtful, sensitive, and kind human beings that I’ve been lucky enough to work with. I can’t thank them enough.”

Fullard said that her personal plan is to leave this earth while playing string quartets, and she is still as passionate about them as when the group was formed back in 1984. “I am so excited to be entering into a fourth decade with this quartet. I welcome Eric and Si-Yan to the group and anticipate looking at the music with new eyes. Each

decade has been special with a lot of musical and life adventures, and I'm still excited about getting up every day and spending time trying to bring this music to life with people that I know. When I look back I feel really lucky — I feel like I am living the dream.”

Next week *ClevelandClassical.com* speaks with Eric Wong and Si-Yan Li.

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