

ENCORE: Cavani Quartet with Mathias & Kim at Tudor House (June 15)

by Robert Rollin



Last Friday evening, June 15, ENCORE presented an enchanting program of chamber music featuring the Cavani String Quartet, soprano Chantal Mathias, and pianist Hyun Soo Kim. The concert, in the Tudor House at Gilmour Academy, was a delightful *mélange* of short, intimate pieces with neo-Romantic, folk-song, and nostalgic connections.

The most immediately affecting were Mathias' and Kim's gorgeous performances of Joseph Kosma's *Les feuilles mortes* ("Autumn Leaves") and Francis Poulenc's *Les chemins de l'amour* ("Pathways of Love"). Both are 1940s popular songs about lost love, with dreamy melodic sequences. *Autumn Leaves*' simplicity captivated the audience.

Great versatility characterized Mathias' wonderful soprano, her darkly beautiful low register shining most radiantly in her French native tongue. Kim's meticulous accompaniment employed little pedal, and was remarkably expressive.

The Cavani String Quartet opened the concert with a tumultuously stunning performance of Anton Webern's *Langsamer Satz*. Cellist Si-Yan Darren Li's entrancing, robust opening solo brought further weight to the work's intense late-romantic flavor.

Although first violinist Annie Fullard led with powerful entrances, it was violist Eric Wong's majestic timbre that took center stage, and second violinist Mari Sato matched Fullard's energy during a prolonged, spirited solo. A long, animated crescendo grew to a full unison and a tour de force that included gravelly *ponticello* tremolos, sudden dynamic shifts, muted passages, and pizzicatos.

The Quartet delighted the audience with magnificent performances of two nostalgic movements by John Corigliano. A photo of the composer's father playing a duet with his own brother inspired the first, *Snapshot, Circa 1909*. Highlights included a beautiful solo from Sato, a breathtakingly high solo by Fullard, and an intense duet between the two of them amid complex extended techniques.



The second, *A Black November Turkey*, is a short, lively scherzo depicting a turkey cock looming over nine chickens. In the first part, Fullard played a very high solo followed by an ensemble unison passage. The second had slower four-part counterpoint and a blatantly high homophonic section, soon followed by a return to the faster opening tempo.

Of the three songs Mathias presented from Gabriel Fauré's *La bonne chanson*, "Puisque l'aube grandit" ("Since Day is Breaking") was the most interesting. Here the protagonist finds renewed hope inspired by love. Soo Kim tossed off the racing accompaniment, while singer and quartet united in flawless ensemble.

Mathias delivered lovely performances in a set of Benjamin Britten's *Folk Song Arrangements*. "Fileuse" ("The Spinner") was especially effective with Kim deftly imitating the spinning wheel.

Though a bit less at home in Italian, Mathias sang Respighi's substantial *Il Tramonto* ("Sunset") with lovely tone. The Cavani shone in their accompaniment, a mixture of late-Romantic chromatic harmony and pentatonic lines highlighted by beautiful solos from Li and Fullard.

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