

## A Friday evening and Sunday afternoon at ENCORE Chamber Music (June 14 & 16)

by Daniel Hathaway



That the Cavani String Quartet, even in its transitional state, continues to draw a large and devoted following attests to its long and close relationship with the many students the ensemble mentored during its tenure at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Those fans, along with current ENCORE Chamber Music participants, packed the music room at Gilmour Academy's Tudor House on Friday, June 14 for a program of Mozart, Martinů, and Dvořák.

Violinists Annie Fullard and Mari Sato, violist Eric Wong, and guest cellist Amit Even-Tov launched the evening with a robust and cheerful account of Mozart's *Quartet in G*, K. 387, preceded by Fullard's reading of a letter from the composer to his mentor, to whom the six "Haydn" quartets were dedicated.

The Cavani produced a plush sound in the intimate space, pointing up the odd *sforzandi* in the menuet and the ornate first violin line in the Andante. The finale began unassumingly, but quickly heated up.

Fullard and Wong returned for Martinů's *Three Madrigals*, which Fullard noted were written for the sister and brother duo of Lillian and Joseph Fuchs, adding that the pieces had a Cleveland connection: Fuchs was concertmaster of The Cleveland Orchestra from 1926 to 1940.

The Madrigals are charmingly conversational, the first rhythmically vital with dialogues of varying length. The second trades trills back and forth before the violin takes off on a melodic tack over viola pizzicatos, then contrasts nervous chromatic scales before the two instruments reach a harmonious detente. Beginning with a highly inflected theme, number three ends in ferocity.

Eric Wong was spokesperson for Dvořák's "American" Quartet, reminding the audience of its origin with the composer's pilgrimage to the colony of fellow Bohemians in Spillville, Iowa, his use of American spirituals and birdsong (a scarlet tanager, to be precise), and his fascination with trains, whose rhythms inspired and energized the finale. Though enthusiasm trumped intonation toward the end, the Cavani gave the piece a vibrant, loving performance, earning a strong ovation from the crowd.

ENCORE's second "Sunday Unplugged" concert in the early afternoon of June 16 featured guest violist Mathieu Herzog and incorporated ENCORE young artists Cameron Alan-Lee (violin) and William Cayanan (cello) into Dvořák's A-Major String Sextet along with violinist Jinjoo Cho, violist Jan Grüning, and cellist Amit Even-Tov.

Though it begins tenderly like a smoothly flowing brook, the first movement of the Sextet soon turns into a surging river (an interesting parallel with the flash flood warnings in effect that day in Northeast Ohio). Folk dances inspired the elegiac Dumka and the animated Furiant. The finale features jumpy, dotted rhythms and concludes with a bravura coda that the ensemble played to the Nines.

Cho, Alan-Lee, Herzog, and Even-Tov returned after intermission with violist Eric Wong for Brahms' *String Quintet No. 2 in G*. It was fun to hear the piece twice in close proximity — it had just been played the evening before on the ChamberFest Cleveland series at CIM's Mixon Hall. The composer intended it to be his last effort before retiring, but then he chanced upon the virtuoso clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, a meeting that inspired his late, great chamber works.

Hearing the Quintet up close in a smallish space was an entirely different experience. The ENCORE ensemble adopted a leisurely pace for the opening movement, playing with a warm sound and giving the cello space to bloom on the opening theme. Violins and violas paired off in delicious section duets, and the flavors of Vienna (references to waltzes) and Hungary (csárdás gestures) came through brilliantly.

By this point in the afternoon, flood watches had morphed into tornado warnings. While whirlwinds didn't materialize outside, inside Tudor House was a different

matter. Although Brahms marked the last movement of his Quintet “lively but not too fast,” the players took his “animato” near the end to mean “race like crazy to the finish” — exactly the right thing to do for an exciting conclusion to a fine matinee concert.

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