

Signum Quartet at ENCORE (June 10)

by Jacob Strauss



On Friday, June 10 the Signum Quartet, coming all the way from Germany to ENCORE at Gilmore Academy, played an eclectic program spanning the era of Schubert to rock classics by Led Zeppelin and Radiohead. The theme of this concert was war and politics, and the programming illustrated the revolutionary nature of the music..

The Dodero Center for the Performing Arts at the Gilmore Academy in Gates Mills is one feature of an impressive campus. The auditorium is shallow, the stage is deep, and the ensemble played without a shell. Throughout the program, the sound, especially in instruments' lower registers, tended to disappear.

An ambitious 45-minute piece that hinges on drastic dynamic contrasts, Schubert's Quartet No. 15 in G was Schubert's last quartet, written in 1826 and published posthumously. Schubert was politically left-leaning, and an outspoken critic of the Austrian Empire. His sense of urgency, its explosion of creativity, and the energy on which it needs to live, gives this work its genius.

First violinist Florian Donderer played with both the energy and the refined sensibility the piece requires, and he did not allow the music to sag when he had the reins to the melody. Second violinist Annette Walther and violist Vandi van Dijk kept its inner rhythmic and harmonic life vital.

The quartet hit their stride in the second and third movements, playing /with great balance and feeling. Cellist Thomas Schmitz began the second movement with an expressive melody, and the ensemble found the perfect tempo for the third-movement scherzo.

The concluding Allegro assai began strong, but at this point, the ensemble had been playing continuously for half an hour, and began to sound fatigued. Balances were off, the momentum flagged, and the final chord was scattered.

Erkki Sven-Tüür's *String Quartet No. 2 "Lost Prayers"* contains jarring moments of violence. The piece is unsettled. There are gunshots, and smoke rises from the gun barrels. Voices cry out and whimper from exhaustion. Visions scurry across the ground, The Signum Quartet built feelings of tension and anxiety with acuity.

Matthijs van Dijk's (*rage*)*rage against the* mirrored Sven-Tüür's work in its use of harmonics and abrasive sounds. However here the wounds were inflicted by slapping the bow on the string and snapping the strings into fingerboards. The musicians stomped the ground, they hummed while they played their instruments. Every conceivable surface of the space and of the instruments was used in the composition, and every gesture thrived on the element of surprise.

Vandi van Dijk's arrangements of Schubert lieder, the art songs that gave the composer some measure of recognition in his lifetime for their popularity inside the home, punctuated each longer composition. Meant to be easily digestible, in the context of this program, they acted both as a palate cleanser and as an agent of contextualization.

The Signum concluded with their own arrangements of Radiohead's *Paranoid Android* and Led Zeppelin's *Heartbreaker*, and left the audience with Valentyn Silvestrov's *Prayer for Ukraine*, composed in 2014.

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