

Artist Management

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## Fine Arts succeeds with precision, Subtlety

The Fine Arts Quartet is an American institution. They have a presence in the world of recorded music that makes the opportunity to hear them live irresistible. The current configuration of the ensemble features violinists Ralph Evans (a Yale alumnus) and Efim Boico, and cellist Wolfgang Laufer — who have been performing together 25 years — and Yuri Gandelsman, arguably the finest quartet violist anywhere, who has been with the ensemble since 2001.

Several impressions made during their performance presented by the Chamber Music Society at Yale in Sprague Memorial Hall were common to the three works they played. The quartet has a product that is extremely well-sanded with a core of interpretive values that impressed repeatedly throughout the evening. Simple things, often: the release of a chord, resonance created through matched vibrato, octave playing balanced perfectly across registers, tempi adjusted in subtle, effortless ways.

The program opened with the first string quartet by Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga. Arriaga was a Spanish composer who created such a presence in the Paris Conservatoire upon his arrival (at age 14) that he became a professor at age 18. He died less than two years later, before his 20th birthday, and left a small but significant collection of music. The Fine Arts Quartet presented this work as a subtle kaleidoscope of textures modeled on more familiar models by Mozart and Haydn that would pivot to reveal the individuality of Arriaga. They focused the first movement with emphasis of a single gesture — an aggressive attack, held then released into sound that was sweet and lyrical. The second movement opens with the progression similar to the first measures of the Largo con gran espressione of Beethoven's piano sonata Op. 7, and the Fine Arts Quartet framed a rich sound against a dramatic and intense reading of the contrasting middle section. The quietly dancing trio of the third movement stood out with its play of ornamental gestures that shifted beats, much to the satisfaction of the ensemble. The work was cast in melancholy at its close.

The first half of the program was rounded off with the Quartet No. 1 by Shostakovich which showcased the playful side of the Fine Arts Quartet. Quasi-romantic portamenti were added to stiffen the sarcasm of the music but many passages, like the second theme group of the first movement, came across as being great fun anyway. The second movement allowed Gandelsman an extended viola solo, which he took at a quick march tempo, as if in a single breath. He caught the spirit of this line.

After intermission we heard the Tchaikovsky Quartet No. 2 in F major, Op. 22. Somehow the first movement lacked the physical drama inherent in the shifting and elusive harmonic scheme, and the resolution of the final bars felt stale. But the second movement was back on track, in a quick tempo that allowed the metric sense of a larger syncopated seven-beat to come across each three-bar phrase. Tchaikovsky used a related metric idea in the second movement of his sixth symphony.

The highlight of the evening was when the building third movement reached the section marked Pochissimo più in E major, then unleashed a glorious sound to the close of the movement; both precise and resonant. The ecstatic atmosphere set the stage for an effervescent finale. The evening was brought to a close with an encore; the last movement of Haydn's Lark Quartet. The precision was emblematic of the evening; four players in a state of motion shaping a series of core interpretive values.