

Fine Arts Quartet in Columbus

“...an impressive example of artistic mastery...”

Quartet lets masters' music shine through

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BY LYNN GREEN FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Chamber Music Columbus presented an impressive example of artistic mastery last night with the Fine Arts Quartet at the Southern Theatre.

The Fine Arts Quartet, in existence since 1939, is the recipient of many recent awards and critical mentions. Three of the members have performed together for 25 years, giving the group a strong cohesiveness.

The players' technical skills are first-rate, their performance flawless and well-balanced save for a few rough sforzandos.

The players avoid overstatement and strive to let the composers' ideas speak for themselves. This denies them a signature sound but gives them an artistic advantage.

They opened their program with Beethoven's Quartet in A major, op. 18, no. 5. Unlike so many other performers, they refused to fall into the trap of "demonstrating" Beethoven's style with overwrought articulation. Instead, they imbued the quartet with a smooth subtlety that underscored the composer's attention to counterpoint and Classical style.

Bernard Herrmann's Echoes took on a decidedly different timbre, replacing the lightness and grace of Beethoven with a plaintive, wooden and haunting sound.

Echoes offers 10 musical vignettes full of memory, desolation and a deep emotional emptiness. Methodical lines contrast with interrupted thoughts, depicting the senses of inner conflict and grit that made Herrmann a master of film scoring.

Robert Schumann's Quartet in A minor, op. 41, no. 1 (which helped to earn the quartet inclusion on the Grammy Awards entry list in 2008) marked a return to a more conventional style. Here, they played with richness and drama, drawing the beauty out of every melodic line and balancing it with the underlying counterpoint. They ventured boldly into Romantic intensity with a sound full of soaring harmonics.

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