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Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Concert Hall

A decade ago, good chamber music was a rarity in Singapore. Today, it seems that just about every chamber ensemble in the world beats a path to the doors of our concert halls and recital studios. This week, the New Zealand String Quartet are in town.

The decision to include their Singapore debut as part of their 30th-anniversary celebrations was, at least in part, down to the recent appointment of their newest member, second violinist Monique Lapins. She is an alumna of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music at the National University of Singapore and was clearly buoyed to be back in her alma mater after having embarked on a professional career with one of the leading string quartets in the world.

Make no mistake, the New Zealand group are one of the leading string quartets in the world. Their playing has enormous vitality and communicates easy enjoyment in the somewhat rarefied world of string quartets. It is at times exciting, at times relaxing, but always completely compelling.

For their Singapore performance, they presented just one work. But it was one of the longest and most demanding string quartets - Beethoven's Op. 59 No. 3, the third of the so-called "Razumovsky" quartets. The story goes that the first performers were so confused by this music that they complained to Beethoven, who responded: "This music is not for you, but for a later age." That later age has certainly

## New Zealand String Quartet

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arrived with the New Zealand String Quartet, who made light work of heavy music.

They stood bunched together so tightly it seemed miraculous their bows did not collide. Physical stature is obviously a requirement with this group and so tall are the three female players that cellist Rolf Gjelsten had to perch himself on a high box simply to keep his head at the same level.

When they played, they presented a tightly unified body, sounding and looking like a single entity. At the ends of movements, they had an endearing way of splitting apart with bows raised high above their heads, adding a fine touch of visual spectacle to the musical drama.

Perhaps there were times in the first movement when some of the quicker details did not bear close scrutiny, but over the cello's pizzicato beat, the second movement seemed to transform itself into a subtly danced shuffle.

First violinist Helene Pohl and violist Gillian Ansell passed the third movement's flowing theme seamlessly back and forth between themselves and the final Fugue flashed around the four players with almost breathtaking athleticism. This was an outstanding exhibition of string quartet playing which was as stimulating as it was refreshing.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/nz-quartet-make-light-work-of-heavy-music>