

Christopher Taylor, Pianist with the Ying Quartet

"... strengths in this performance included crisp coordination of piano and strings, keyed to Taylor's unfailingly alert rhythmic sense and bold sonority."

Ying Quartet makes itself at home in city performance

By Jay Harvey jay.harvey@indystar.com
October 08, 2009 06:04 AM IndyStar.com

The Ying Quartet has a long history with the Ensemble Music Society. And pianist Christopher Taylor's honors include a 2000 fellowship with the American Pianists Association.

So everybody onstage Wednesday at the Indiana History Center seemed a little bit back home in Indiana.

Ten years ago, the Yings helped the Indianapolis-based EMS usher in the concert history of the new Indiana History Center. They had first been its guests four years before, back when their name became known nationally as one of the National Endowment for the Arts' most successful projects, with a two-year residency in an Iowa town.

To complete the Hoosier links, the quartet's return visit to open the EMS season included its new violinist, Frank Huang, a laureate in the 2002 International Violin Competition of Indianapolis. He has replaced Timothy Ying, who now lives in Toronto, as first violinist in the sibling quartet.

The bulk of Wednesday's program was two major works for piano quintet (as a string quartet plus piano is known). Brahms' brilliant Quintet in F minor, op. 34, held sway over the second half of the concert. Its strengths in this performance included crisp coordination of piano and strings, keyed to Taylor's unfailingly alert rhythmic sense and bold sonority.

The string players -- besides Huang, second violinist Janet Ying, violist Phillip Ying and cellist David Ying -- drew a lot of their color and energy from Taylor's captivating performance. The Ying Quartet is seasoned enough to make its own mark even in partnership with such a vivid keyboard guest, but Taylor's interpretive personality still dominated.

This was foreshadowed by the Shostakovich Quintet, op. 57, before intermission. The 20th-century Russian's work often separates the five players briefly, dividing them into smaller units with kaleidoscopic variety. Thus one could enjoy, despite Taylor's prominence, more pronounced expressive projection by quartet members, especially in the Intermezzo movement.

The Ying Quartet opened the program without Taylor, playing Beethoven's Quartet in D major, op. 18, no. 3. The laid-back yet forward-looking reading of the first movement was subtly inviting, but the "Andante con moto" started off woodenly -- too loud and not particularly attentive to the score's dynamic fluctuations.

Things righted themselves with a fast, neat third movement, but it was particularly in the "Presto" finale, with its split-second coordination and accumulation of well-turned phrases, that the Yings sounded like a masterly ensemble.