

Lafayette Quartet struggles with program

By Avigdor Zoromp
special writer

The number of competent string quartet groups is large and keeps growing. This makes the competition for top spots extremely fierce.

The Lafayette String Quartet is one of a few who are winning this quest for the top. This group of four young women has made tremendous progress since its inception five years ago. It is quartet-in-residence at the Center for Creative Studies - Institute for Music and Dance in Detroit and at Oakland University. It consists of violinists Ann Elliott-Goldschmid and Sharon Slans, violist Joanna Hood and cellist Pamela Highbaugh.

Their recent program was presented at Orchestra Hall Thursday.



Avigdor Zoromp

Some of the dilemmas facing such an aspiring chamber group were manifested on that occasion. Among the greatest challenges facing any performing group is the constant expansion of repertoire. The tradeoff is between a more secure, predictable and repellible repertoire on one hand, and fresh but possibly flawed selections on the other. This program reflected the second side of the equation.

Two of the works are seldom heard. The one by the more established composer - Quartet Op. 33 No. 1 in B minor by Haydn - probably has greater appeal to most listeners. The other, the String Quartet by Australian-born Peter Schulthorpe, is a 1959 composition which is, however, accessible to many due to its moderate use of contemporary techniques.

The most substantial item was

Schubert's famed Quintet in C Major. Cellist Paul Katz, joined the quartet for this performance. Katz is the cellist of the Cleveland String Quartet, scheduled to appear here next week on the Chamber Music Society series.

THE WORK by Schulthorpe contains rhythmic patterns of rick-pounding music from Bali intertwined with movements that are tonal even by Western standards. It offers some variation from the standard repertoire which isn't too difficult to digest, even though it may not be profound. In the quest for novelty it was a reasonable choice.

ent in some portions of these works, but not always. Both the Haydn and Schubert works were new in the group's repertoire - and this was noticeable. The opening movement of the Haydn quartet was performed in the most elegant manner. The final Presto movement, however, was too slow and cumbersome, with a substantial loss of stylistic agility. A comparison with final movements of other Haydn works with fast eighth notes should point the way toward a more authentic execution.

Schubert's Quintet is formidable. Considering that only a couple of weeks were invested in it, the results were triumphant. Especially in the slow movement, the ebbing themes reflected artistic and musical inspiration.

In the faster movements, however, the lack of preparation was more evident. This was especially so in the development sections of the first and final movements, where the music seemed to disappear occasionally in a musical analogue of the Bermuda Triangle, but fortunately managed to emerge eventually at the other end of the twilight zones. The climactic ending of the final movement left much to be desired.

In time, the Lafayette should be able to strike a better balance between the old and proven and the new and more risky. Their ability to master profound and challenging works isn't in doubt. But, there should always be some work on a given program in which they can put their best effort forward.

One-selection Mahler program goes over big

By Avigdor Zoromp
special writer

It is said that a Mahler symphony contains a complete universe. This certainly applies to the Seventh, which was the single item on last week's Detroit Symphony Orchestra program.

One of my Bruckner barbs is that Mahler's symphonies run longer, but Bruckner's seem longer. A Mahler symphony takes the listener on a trip through the universe, which is a tall order for a work that lasts only 80-90 minutes.

In terms of absolute length, there may have been room for another work on this program, which started at 8:30 p.m. and ended before 10 p.m.

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with no intermission - making it among the shortest in global duration. However, an entity that encompasses the universe leaves no room for anything else. Thus, the decision of Maestro Gunther Herbig to let this mammoth work stand by itself

review

was appropriate.

The universe contained in Mahler's Seventh contains more than a long series of complex orchestral sounds. While many intricate combinations are there, to be sure, there are other segments which are economical and compact in their intimate detail. Thus, side by side with the reinforced brass section, Mahler saw fit to include the softer effects of special instruments such as a mandolin and a guitar.

Herbig was in top form Saturday night. His penetrating perception of

this most intricate work guided this performance through its darkest episodes. This reference is to the musical darkness of the "Night Music" portion of this work, not as a blemish on the performance itself.

Much like the effect of a total eclipse - the dimming light, the subsequent darkness and then the encouraging light - these inner three

movements left their imprint on the large audience.

This isn't the effect an actual eclipse has on a modern person armed with the scientific facts, but the effect on the more subjective and emotional mind. The idyllic fourth movement was a source of joy and contentment, following the gloomy and fatalistic effects of the previous movements. Concermaster Emmanuelle Bolsvert moved the audience with some poignant passages.

The triumphant movement was climactic beyond its massive volume - the attention to detail was never substantially compromised. The

brass, winds and strings fell into place with impressive proportions, astounding the audience with the splendor of this ingenious musical architecture.

Happily, the trend of large attendance continued this week. This was quite distinct from past occasions, in which Mahler symphonies didn't seem to have mass appeal. This performance was followed by a long, persistent applause with a standing ovation - which were well deserved.

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