

# JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

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### Juilliard String Quartet: Beyond perfect

By LAURA STEWART

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DAYTONA BEACH -- To say that the Juilliard String Quartet gave a peerless performance Thursday would be only stating the expected: as The Juilliard School's quartet-in-residence, the ensemble that was founded in 1946 has long been at the very top of the musical world.

But the Quartet's program, presented by Central Florida Cultural Endeavors, did more than underline its eminence. It also showed how four masters -- violinists Joel Smirnoff and Ronald Copes, violist Samuel Rhodes and cellist Joel Krosnick -- can continue to immerse themselves in their music, and to make it newly vibrant.

That was particularly challenging in a concert so intense that even the rain that pounded the News-Journal Center during the most exquisite passages of Bela Bartok's String Quartet No. 5 only added to the work's tension, and extreme beauty.

The concert began and ended with vivid Romantic compositions that framed the evening's centerpiece, the Bartok Quartet, and the audience needed the tenderness and melancholy they provided. Felix Mendelssohn's Andante and Scherzo, Op. 81, tapped into heights and depths of human experience that were then more angularly, vividly developed in the Bartok.

Yet if the richly textured, reflective Andante and Scherzo were all the Quartet had offered its rapt audience, it would have been enough. The musicians were, satisfyingly, not polished as they presented the tender, tight Andante and then the Scherzo, lighter but equally replete with colorful nuances.

The tone changed dramatically with Bartok's gritty, highly expressive Quartet, a work first performed at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., in 1935. Worlds away from Mendelssohn's 1847 pieces -- and just as remote from the closing composition, Franz Schubert's 1826 String Quartet No. 14 in D minor ("Death and the Maiden") -- the Bartok nonetheless exuded the essential humanity the Quartet found in all three works.

And that, combined with their absolute virtuosity and ease with one another, set the evening apart. The Quartet played with a vigorous synthesis, but also with a rough edge that was as much psychically abrasive as sonic. The dissonant Allegro was edgy, and the almost inhuman sounds in the Adagio that followed, with the violin's high, thin cry and cello's echoing growl, tapped into an essential modern angst, and proved art's ability to communicate.

A lively strand of folk themes wove in and out of the evening's otherwise very diverse works, and the Quartet made the most of the unifying thread. What seemed to most interest them in their strenuous, actually heroic performance, however, was their shared ability to make the most complex passages seem spontaneous, as if the works were being created on the spot.

**The Juilliard Quartet gave a full-throttle, quietly sensational performance, and set a lofty new standard for chamber music in Central Florida.**

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