

JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

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Weekend review roundup: Juilliard String Quartet

Tim Smith, DECEMBER 8, 2009

On Sunday night, the Shriver Hall Concert Series provided a welcome opportunity to get acquainted with the most recent personnel of the Juilliard String Quartet, one of the best known and highest-standard brands in classical music for more than 60 years.

Violinist Nick Eanet has only recently taken the first chair in the group; the start of his tenure was delayed when he broke his wrist while skating in Central Park a few months ago. He sounded thoroughly at home here, not just blending in with violinist Ronald Copes, violist Samuel Rhodes and cellist Joel Krosnick, but making richly detailed music with them.

There was a dynamic warmth to the performance of Mendelssohn's D major Quartet (Op. 44, No. 1), a sense of spontaneity in the beautifully molded phrasing. Same for Schumann's A major Quartet (Op. 41, No. 3). The slow movements of both works inspired particularly eloquent playing.

Spiritually, you could say that this was an all-German program, since the other piece, the Quartet No. 5 by contemporary Argentinean-born composer Mario Davidovsky, was inspired by Beethoven's Op. 132. It's not that you hear Beethoven clearly in the music, but Davidovsky makes you sense something of Beethoven's profundity in this score's masterfully communicative dissonance and wide range of tone coloring. The Juilliard ensemble made the work a taut, involving drama.

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