

# JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

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FROM:

*The Washington Post*

**Music**

## **Juilliard String Quartet's Intricate Discourse**

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- [Robert Battey](#)

“The distinguished [Juilliard](#) String Quartet made a rare visit to the [National Gallery](#) on Sunday. After 61 years and numerous personnel changes, this is one of the great American quartets. They now reveal a more complex mesh of individualities than under their longtime first violinist Robert Mann. There is little eye contact during performance (and, indeed, Mann's successor Joel Smirnoff plays for extended periods with his eyes closed), but they still have their fabled precision of ensemble, and wide dynamic range. Most importantly, they still convey the drama and rhetoric of the music with all the intensity of yore, perhaps even more so now.

[Verdi](#)'s lone string quartet has long been a specialty of this group, and they handled the awkward and unidiomatic passage-work with practiced ease, faltering only briefly in the scherzo. Elliott Carter's Second Quartet is almost 50 years old, yet it remains as spinose and elusive as ever. Carter's highly refracted and layered music lacks any conventional gestures (the instruments never play anything together), let alone harmonic or melodic guideposts. But when essayed with such fervor as here, his vision is somehow compelling; it is as though some complex scientific process like atom-splitting is rendered in sound. Not for every taste, but reflective of today's clinical, minatory world.”

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*Colbert Artists Management*

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019

www.colbertartists.com ~ 212-757-0782