

JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

Quartet gives smart concert

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BY RICHARD COWAN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

In an exceptional concert, vivacious and intelligent, marred only by a bit of overly aggressive playing that sporadically let punch win out over beauty, the Juilliard String Quartet performed Tuesday evening at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music.

They opened with Mozart's sunny G major quartet, K 387, the work that provoked Joseph Haydn to exclaim to Mozart's father, "I profess that your son is the greatest composer known to me." The quirky, ghostly Shostakovich 14th in F Sharp major, Opus 142, followed. Post-intermission, the musicians offered Beethoven's Quartet in C sharp minor, Opus 131.

The players performed the Mozart with great team spirit, running up and down scaled passages with skilled exactitude. Intonation, or playing in tune, is spring training for musicians. Quicksilver shifts between an aggressive, muscular style that released into a warm, liquid cantabile were ear-catching. The top treble player, Joel Smirnoff, though occasionally icy-toned, otherwise led with genuine enthusiasm.

Rhythmically driven, peasant-like motifs, married to mournfully introspective episodes, describe the Russian work, composed in 1973.

Complex scenarios were suggested, like a Russian countryside viewed from a rushing train, through a darkened, muddied window in a bright white winter. Sonorous, quasi-operatic solos were evinced from the cello of Joel Krosnick.

The melancholy, weighty Beethoven constantly morphs, passing through titillating, raucously fun sequences as well. One admired the luminescent throb in the playing of certain high passages, a lava-like vibration held in the palm of the hand.

Second violinist Ronald Copes played with class and beauty, violist Samuel Rhodes with intuition and subtlety.

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