

# JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

## A neglected work comes up big

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By Andrew Adler • October 18, 2004

Before yesterday, it had been a bit more than 20 years since the Juilliard String Quartet played Hugo Wolf's Quartet in D Minor on a Chamber Music Society program. I can't confess to recall that particular performance, but one thing is certain: I won't be forgetting the Juilliard's re-embrace of the piece.

This was a staggering, gargantuan account of a score that — for few discernable reasons — hasn't penetrated to the core of the quartet repertoire.

Perhaps the D Minor's relative obscurity (next to Wolf's "Italian Serenade") is because it's about 45 minutes long, often ferociously difficult in both its technical demands and its peculiar rhetoric.

Wolf began the work while still a teenager and finished it when he was not yet 25. Yet listening to the Juilliard's way with the piece yesterday at the University of Louisville School of Music, little about the music seemed immature or ill-considered. Instead, the D Minor quartet emerged as a masterly, confident act of creation. It is a heroic score, and the Juilliard gave it a heroic reading.

The ensemble's current members — violinists Joel Smirnoff and Ronald Copes, violist Samuel Rhodes and cellist Joel Krosnick — reveled in every challenge put before them.

In opening remarks to the CMS audience, Rhodes spoke of Wolf's allusions to Beethoven, Wagner and Bruckner, and indeed from the opening of the first movement the music occupied a sequence of parallel landscapes. Through everything, the Juilliard's concentration was applied in absolute service to the demands of each moment. The ensemble's understanding was complete; its communication was direct.

Amid a performance of encompassing authority, the extended slow movement rose up with particular distinction. Wolf initially placed it second, before the scherzo, later reordering it third, where the Juilliard wisely played it. Just as Bruckner quotes Wagner in the adagio to his Seventh Symphony, Wolf engages the worlds of both these composers in his *Langsam* movement. The Juilliard could hardly have been more eloquent.

Emphasizing the afternoon's Viennese context, the foursome opened its program with early Schubert and closed with late Mozart. First came Schubert's Quartet in E-flat Major, D. 87, and the Juilliard danced merrily along, most winningly in the Scherzo's winking up-bow accents. Mozart's Quartet in D Major, K. 499 (the so-called "Hoffmeister"), among the genuine glories of the chamber literature, was a sumptuous experience: big quartet, big sound, big pleasure.

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