

# JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

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**String music brings back memories of days at MSU**

**By Ken Glickman**

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When the famed Juilliard String Quartet performs at the Wharton Center on Wednesday, some people will remember when the group was almost like family on the MSU campus.

For nine years beginning in the late 1970s, the quartet had a residency at the Michigan State University School of Music that included regular concerts at the then-Lecture-Concert Series and the Wharton Center.

"We feel like we're coming home in a way," said Joel Krosnick, cellist with the quartet since 1974. "We loved our years at MSU."

The arrangement was made by then music school chairman James Niblock, who was a longtime friend of the quartet's first violinist and founder, Robert Mann.

Krosnick remembers the meeting in a New York restaurant. "Jim was impressed with the Beethoven quartet cycle we just performed and the musical vitality we displayed," he said. "He asked us what it would take for us to have a long-term presence on campus. We talked about it, and then Jim put a phone call in to (MSU president) Clifton Wharton, and came back to the table and said that he could do it."

Krosnick remembers coaching cellists and student string quartets while the MSU marching band rehearsed outside his window. "Something you wouldn't experience in Manhattan," he quipped. He also speaks about leaving the music school at the end of the day with Juilliard violist Samuel Rhodes and stopping by the baseball field and watching MSU play.

A program called "Among Friends" was produced about the MSU residency by Bob Albers and WKAR-TV. "My family watches it all the time," Krosnick said.

"The MSU faculty was enormously welcoming," he added. "And because of that, we felt the sky was the limit in terms of what we could do."

The residency was so successful that Joseph Polisi, president of New York-based Juilliard, said to the ensemble: "I want you to do the stuff you did at MSU for us here at Juilliard."

One very popular program was having three-hour rehearsals open to the public. The students had a rare chance to see how an ensemble of virtuosos like the Juilliard worked together, criticized each other and conceptualized musical ideas. The group now has public rehearsals every month at Juilliard.

The quartet looks different today. Mann, the founder, retired a few years back and was replaced by then second violinist Joel Smirnoff. Over the 59-year history of this award-winning ensemble, there have been 11 players.

But the style and sound is much the same. "We certainly haven't changed purposely, but we have matured as musicians and ideas have changed," Krosnick said.

It's easy to hear for yourself. The group has made over 100 recordings, the first one in 1949. It has earned four Grammy awards.

When it was formed in 1946, the Juilliard was the first American-born and American-trained string quartet.

From the beginning, the quartet was known for its commitment to playing music of our day as well as fresh interpretations of the masters. It also was known for a style that was strong, sometimes raucous, and vibrant. During a performance, Mann would move on his chair so vigorously that it seemed he might fall off.

Krosnick said Smirnoff is similar. "There is no riskier or more daring first violinist than Joel Smirnoff. He often closes his eyes and just lets it rip. Anything can happen."

Each member of the quartet is a faculty member of the Juilliard School, but the quartet exists independent of the school. It performs about 60 concerts a year.

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