

# JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

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## MUSIC IN REVIEW

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### **'Art of Fugue'**

*Alice Tully Hall*

Now and again the Juilliard Quartet sets aside its usual repertory to take up Bach's "Art of Fugue," and it is well worth being there when that happens. Clearly, this is no secret, for there was a line stretching round the block on Monday evening, when the musicians presented a performance at Alice Tully Hall.

As the ensemble's viola player, Samuel Rhodes, pointed out in his estimable notes, Bach's late monument was not written for string quartet, nor does it quite suit the instruments. Ronald Copes, normally the second violinist, had to spend most of the evening on viola, while Mr. Rhodes played on a noble instrument he had commissioned from Marten Cornelissen to handle the low-lying tenor part. More or less friendly rivalry at the top, which gives usual quartet textures some of their excitement, was thus replaced by the movement of four different instruments in their own connecting spaces.

Nevertheless, one of the great essentials and pleasures of quartet playing — the bounce of distinct personalities in a common field — was there in full measure. Joel Smirnoff played the top part with shining brilliance and averted by his flowing ease any suggestion that the rapid figuration was made for fingers at a keyboard. Mr. Copes's austere gravity contrasted with Mr. Rhodes's steady warmth, and Joel Krosnick, on cello, often brought an energetic and characterful nonlegato to his phrases.

Even with these differences, or perhaps partly because of them, the counterpoint seemed to be building itself with unerring calm, through moments of lament, humor and magnificence.

PAUL GRIFFITHS

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