

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

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**Our Rating: A-**

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**Name:** Juilliard String Quartet

**Genre:** Classical

**ShowTime:** Oct. 6

**Location:** Gates Concert Hall

**Quartet's interpretations impeccable, unexpected**

**By Marc Shulgold, Rocky Mountain News**

**October 7, 2004**

Since its creation in 1946, the Juilliard String Quartet has been a composer's best friend.

Despite the occasional personnel changes, the ensemble has maintained the highest of standards, bringing clarity and effortlessness to whatever music sits before them.

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As a result, all that remains is for their audience to bask in the greatness of what is being played. And that, any composer will tell you, is the whole idea.

On Wednesday, the group returned to Friends of Chamber Music, offering yet another evening of nearly flawless performance.

There was Beethoven, of course – the second of the three *Razoumovsky* Quartets. And there was Bartok, a composer long associated with the Juilliard (the original foursome introduced the Bartok Six to America way back when).

We expect deep, probing accounts of those two giants from this ensemble. What may have been unexpected to those who packed Gates Concert Hall was the opening work by Haydn.

The D-major Quartet comes from Haydn's final half-dozen in the medium he helped father - and it's a doozy. Opus 76, No. 5 seems way ahead of its time (1797), with a slow movement that begins as a naive little three-chord tune but quickly turns soulful and deep. Its romantic sentiments and slowly unfolding beauty anticipate the passion of Schubert (who was born one year after its completion).

This was hardly a dainty little curtain-raiser - but then, nothing is taken for granted by the Juilliard.

Bartok's Third Quartet received an equally thoughtful account, displaying the solid musicianship of each of the players: violinists Joel Smirnoff and Ronald Copes, violist Samuel Rhodes and cellist Joel Krosnick. All those treacherous, turn-on-a-dime mood shifts were handled expertly, without drawing excessive attention to the group's consummate virtuosity.

The evening concluded with the Beethoven, a work that brims with warm feelings despite its dark key of E minor. Those tricky syncopations in the Allegretto were turned into a gay little dance, and the high-energy finale never spun out of control, as it sometimes will in lesser hands. The tempos were impeccably chosen, allowing the catchy tunes to be heard and understood - rather than plowed over in the race to the finish line.

OK, so not every note was in place during this demanding program, but the level of musicianship never dipped.

Longtime Juilliard fans have come to expect tasteful tempos and ideal balances and selfless interpretations.

It's an approach that should be the standard for every string quartet. As a matter of fact, it is.