

# ROSSETTI

## STRING QUARTET

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ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Rossetti String Quartet makes a great debut Ensemble shows unusually fine balance

Monday, April 26, 2004

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Talk about good first impressions. The Rossetti String Quartet, making its Ann Arbor debut Saturday evening at Rackham Auditorium under University Musical Society auspices, made a great one. In string quartets by Mozart and Debussy, and with pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet in the Franck piano quintet, the Rossetti players - violinists Timothy Fain and Henry Gronnier; violist Thomas Diener; and cellist Eric Gaenslen - offered some of the most exhilarating and exalted playing of this or recent seasons. Just pray UMS already has this group, formed in 1996, lined up for a return.

You might have thought something interesting was afoot when the players came out on stage, with Gronnier leading, in leather pants and a black shirt embroidered in burnt orange. You might have thought something interesting was afoot when the players sat down - in the unusual order, left to right, of first violin, cello, viola and second violin. You knew something interesting was afoot when the players finished the first phrase of the Mozart String Quartet in G Major, K. 387: great balance, sweet sound, elastic shaping, whispered ending.

It may be that some of the Rossetti's soundprint stems from their seating. The middle-voice of the viola is more revealed in this full-frontal position - all to the good when you have a player like Diener, whose sound is so warm and extraordinary - and the violins, book-ending the quartet, achieve a sort of stereophonic separation. The cello, meanwhile, seems happy to have the first violin to talk to; certainly, Gaenslen and Fain seemed engrossed by the low-high conversation.

But if seating accounts for part of the quartet's unusually fine balance, the rest of the credit goes what the players achieve in that formation. Leading the group, Fain plays with a relaxed, unforced ease and a finely etched sound that Gronnier matches; as the group's low-voice anchor, Gaenslen provides both firm ground and supply shaped melody.

In the Mozart, everything had its sense of courtly measure; nothing was rushed, ritards were graceful but judicious; long lines sang out (much of the playing all evening had an expressive vocal quality); and dynamics were shaded to give maximum life to the phrase. Nor was fun absent, in a minuet whose displaced accents the group handled to perfection.

In the Debussy String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10, that followed, the group once again found the perfect voice; perfect tunings and beautifully calibrated tempo transitions made the music's impulsion and waves of sound all the more compelling. Most thrilling, perhaps, was the second movement, "Assez vif et bien rythme," with its pizzicati and its softest of soft endings; the third movement, "Andantino doucement expressif," with its poignancy and purity of sound, was its close equal.

After intermission, Thibaudet, who made a UMS solo debut in 1998, joined the Rossetti players for the Franck Quintet for Piano and Strings in F Minor. He added his luminous voice and light hand to the group's for a performance as remarkable for its propulsive drama as for its mystery and poetry. An encore - the joyous third movement of the Dvorak Quintet for Piano and Strings in A Major, Op. 81 - was an unexpected gift. The remaining movements would make for a happy return.

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