

# ROSSETTI STRING QUARTET

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**Rossetti Quartet's splendid performance is a treat for audience  
By MICKEY COALWELL Special to The Star**

Saturday night's performance by the Rossetti Quartet, the Carlsen Center's visiting quartet in residence, was held in the intimate confines of the Polsky Center.

A relatively small but receptive audience heard a program of Beethoven, Harbison and Dvorak, and for some, it was the first opportunity to check out Timothy Fain, who replaced Nina Bodner as the group's first violinist in 2002.

The Rossetti Quartet has been around since 1996, and in spite of a few personnel changes it remains one of the most respected and admired young quartets in the business. The quartet is currently all male, with Fain joining founding members Henry Gronnier, violin, and Thomas Diener, viola. Eric Gaenslen is the group's cellist.

Fain is clearly a gifted violinist. He continues to pursue a solo career in addition to his quartet duties, and his playing is both forward and highly inflected. At first blush, he does not seem well-matched to the other players, who are more retiring in tone and intensity, but his individuality brings a new, robust persona to the group.

Beethoven's Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4, an early Viennese work that nevertheless shows definite hints of the originality and eccentricity to come, was splendidly played with hairpin dynamics and meticulous phrasing. The gypsy-flavored rondo finale was especially fine.

John Harbison's Quartet No. 4 (2001) proved to be eminently listenable. Harbison, an esteemed American composer and Pulitzer Prize winner, was a student of both Piston and Sessions.

Harbison's later works have shed any slavish adherence to dodecaphonic principles, and this quartet flirts with tonality for long stretches. It is essentially rhapsodic in character, though structured in four compact movements, and written quite idiomatically for the string quartet.

There is plenty of drama in the work, and the work's final statement, played in unison by all four strings, is quite striking. It's a piece that bears repeated listening.

The last half of the program was devoted to a satisfying traversal of Antonin Dvorak's Quartet in A Flat Major, Op. 105. Begun in America, but finished after Dvorak's return to his beloved Bohemia, this is one of a pair of masterful quartets composed by Dvorak in 1895.

The Rossetti gave it an unabashedly sentimental, heart-on-sleeve performance that captured Dvorak's nostalgic affection for his homeland.

The second movement features a long, sweet, wistful melody spun out by the first violin, which Fain imbued with a throbbing lyricism reminiscent of an older generation of players - Isaac Stern, perhaps, or Aaron Rosand. Cellist Gaenslen's pizzicato accompaniment in this movement was especially brilliant.

The Rossetti String Quartet is named for the 19th century British poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose works are distinguished by his eye for beauty and intensity of vision. The Rossettis did their namesake proud in Saturday's performance, which was full of ardor, color, and poetry.

*Colbert Artists Management Inc.*

111 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019  
(212)757-0782 - Fax (212)541-5179 - West Coast (858)794-0182  
E-mail: NYColbert@ColbertArtists.com