

ROSSETTI

STRING QUARTET

Peninsula Reviews

Lyn Bronson

November 18, 2005

Last night at All Saints Church in Carmel, the Rossetti String Quartet had a triumph of the highest order. We heard glorious artistic playing in a venue with superb acoustics, and, as an added plus, the presenting organization, The Mozart Society of California, invited the audience after the concert to a charming and lavish reception to meet the artists.

Not every chamber music concert is a barrel of fun. In fact, sometimes we hear even the most exalted, world-famous string quartet players in concert, where the performance is polished, musically correct, technically impeccable, yet something is missing. In these situations the audience goes away unsatisfied with a feeling that it had been waiting for something to happen that failed to happen. What qualities are we talking about? We are talking about beauty, excitement, passion, conviction — qualities that can leap across the invisible space separating performers from members of the audience to grab them by the hearts and move them intensely. Well, when the Rossetti String Quartet performed last night, we heard vital, exciting music making that grabbed us by the throat, rammed us up against a wall and commandeered our attention for the better part of two hours. This was a concert to remember, for this was a concert where we were transported on a magical journey.

If the members of the Rossetti String Quartet, Timothy Fain and Henry Gronnier (violins), Thomas Diener (viola) and Eric Gaensten (cello), made a strong impression when they were presented in concert by the Mozart Society in 2003, they went over the top in last night's concert. From the first notes of Haydn's Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 64, No. 3, we were aware of an impressive, all-encompassing mastery such as we rarely hear — even from the most distinguished string quartets in the world. We heard an effortless virtuosity in the repartee between the players, yet there was also enough restraint and discipline so that every phrase seemed natural and never forced. The Haydn Quartet was not all fireworks, for there were moments of lovely serenity in the *Adagio* and witty playfulness in the *Menuetto*, but it was in the outer movements that

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

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we heard the most extraordinary playing. In the Finale, *Allegro con spirito*, these four players created almost a symphonic texture that was vivid, expansive and abandoned.

The next work on the program, Mozart's String Quartet in D Major, K.575, made us aware that the extraordinary performance of the Haydn String Quartet was a hard act to follow, for the Mozart Quartet paled by comparison, perhaps with the exception of the great finale movement. Nevertheless, there was some fine ensemble playing, and there was a lovely consistency of stylistic perfection.

After intermission we heard the final work, Mendelssohn's String Quartet No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 44, No. 2. The first movement began with such wild abandon (like the Haydn Quartet that opened the concert), that it also seemed like a symphonic movement with full, rich sonorities that easily filled the vast space of All Saints Church. Swirling passages and impassioned melodies achieved an astounding clarity and vitality. In the *Scherzo* that followed we heard some impressive fast moving elfin-like passages that also achieved magnificent clarity. After the lovely, lyrical *Andante* movement, the final *Presto agitato* was again so voluminous that it seemed like a symphonic movement, or perhaps I should say that at times it seemed like a concerto movement, because of the fantastic playing by first violinist Timothy Fain. Mr. Fain is one of the finest violinists I have ever heard, with technique to burn, although he never permits it to get in the way of the music. His tone is pure and lovely, and the elegant way he shaped melodies and passages was magical.

After a tremendous ovation, we were rewarded with one encore, the slow movement from Dvorak's String Quartet, Op. 105. As mentioned above, the acoustics at All Saints Church in Carmel are fantastic. I sat in the first row during the first half, and in one of the rear rows for the remainder of the concert, and the sound was fabulous in both areas.

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