

The Jupiter String Quartet and Pianist David Deveau performed at MIT's Kresge Auditorium at 20:00 on Friday, November 11th, 2011. Nelson Lee (violin), Meg Freivogel (violin), Daniel McDonough (cello), and Liz Freivogel (viola) formed the Jupiter Quartet after meeting one another during their undergraduate studies. Subsequently, the group moved to Boston to finish their education together at the New England Conservatory, where they were enrolled in the Professional String Quartet Training Program. Since then, the Quartet plays internationally; they perform a variety of classical string quartets from Beethoven to Bartok to inspire “future classical music audiences” through the “intense interplay and communication” of chamber music.[1] Their work is widely acclaimed, and has won them multiple awards and honors, both nationally and internationally. As an active listener in their audience, one becomes entranced in their work - as they masterfully craft their bodily movements and passion into a dance, with which they transmit music of the ages through the equally well-crafted sound of their instruments.

The Quartet played two pieces alone before Deveau joined them to play their final piece. The performance began with Beethoven's Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18 No. 6, moved on to Prokofiev's Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92, and ended with Dvorák's Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 81. During the concert, I felt that Dvorák's Piano Quintet was by far the most interesting, enchanting, and entertaining performance. However, after listening to each piece again, I find all three of them have equally thrilling themes, 'motifs', and movement as a whole. I can't find a good explanation for the discrepancies between my concert and post-concert opinions, but it may have been the appearance and excitement of the performers, the change in lighting during the performance, or the venue.

As mentioned above, the concert was held in Kresge Auditorium, which was an excellent venue for the Quartet. The acoustics in Kresge are superb – I felt as if I were sitting within a few inches of the performers, despite sitting ten meters away. The warm wooden stage produced an intimate atmosphere that accentuated the performance, performers, and their instruments. Though at first I didn't notice, during their first piece the stage lights were dim. I found it difficult to concentrate on the performers after some time, while the lights were dim. After the first piece, and subsequently after the second, the Quartet asked for more light on stage, which the man in the lighting booth seemed reluctant to produce. With more light on stage, I maintained a higher level of focus throughout the latter two pieces, which certainly made the performances more enjoyable.

Of the three pieces, I think my favorite is Dvorák's Piano Quintet. Each piece had its strong notes and flourishes, but by far the most enthralling musical story I'd heard that night came from Dvorák. The opening minute of the first movement captures that sense of the entire piece - the quickly moving themes of sorrow, excitement, desperation, and anxiety; the flourishes, clever transitions, accentuated dynamics, and musical cooperation between instruments; and the passion that goes into each player's movement. I thought the Eastern European influence on the piece was powerful – it created a setting sometime before World War II in which the rest of the piece moved. Often the piece evoked a story that revolved around a young character's travels through a run-down walled city. The dramatic changes in 'musical mood' brought about interaction with his surroundings and others, producing early-film-like musical dances, chases, and slow walks in deep introspection. This story held well until the third movement, at which point the piece began describing vignettes of the countryside. I liked these aural vignettes very much. The last vignette, marked by beautifully slow interludes acting as a

supporting scaffold to rapid repetition of the last movement's theme was literally eye-opening and jaw-dropping. I couldn't have heard a better finish to the piece. The Quartet had me in awe, my hands striking one another without me telling them to. I also like the description of the finale from wikipedia,

“The Finale is light-hearted and spirited. The second violin leads the theme into a fugue in the development section. In the coda, Dvořák writes *tranquillo* for a chorale-like section, which features the theme of the movement this time in augmentation and played *pianissimo*, before the pace quickens with an *accelerando*, and the quintet rushes to the finish.” [2]

Lastly, the most effective elements of the piece were the piano-driven transitions in the first and second movement. It's difficult to describe them, but often the piano would take a fast or slow moving melody and use the off-beats to drag the melody to another time scale, as well as another theme/motif. The subtlety of each transition, and its perfect execution made me smile each time I heard one.

Their first piece, Beethoven's Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6 was enchanting in very different ways from the Piano Quintet. I didn't have many stories associated with the first movement of the piece. Rather, I mostly saw an old-school English ballroom filled with the rigidly dancing powdered rich. The second and fourth movements of the piece were filled with more emotion, and evoked a sense of stability and comfort in me. Regardless, the slow tempo of the majority of the piece, combined with the dim stage lighting made it easy to doze off. The dynamics of the piece were helpful in the prevention of my drooping eyelids, but also certainly made the piece much more interesting. Though I can't quite put my finger on it, something about the piece seemed like it wasn't full. There was something missing – perhaps depth, but I'm not

sure. I think the piece was a good choice as an introduction to the Quartet, as it certainly left the audience wanting more.

Their second piece, Prokofiev's Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92 was completely new to me, in the sense that I had never heard such clashing classical music before. Yet, within a few minutes of listening, the tones begin to make sense, and evoke a very peculiar feeling about the piece. There is a tension in the notes and timbre of the quartet that I hadn't heard anywhere else. The theme evoked the feeling of the drive for freedom, whereas the theme's surrounding brought about conflict and restraint. Some further research revealed that the piece was written during World War II, and was based on the folk music in the town of Nalchik, of the Kabardino-Balkaria Autonomous Republic (in Russia). The second and third movements of the piece are significantly less optimistic than the first, but equally as emotional and dramatic. Notes of despair, sorrow, and even suffocation seemed to pop up in pockets throughout the movements. Similar to the lack of depth or fullness in Beethoven's piece, there was a lack of wholeness in the latter two movements of Prokofiev's piece. It was almost as if the first movement was the climax of the piece, and for the remainder, the listener was intended to listen to the piece's decline. The finale, as well, was by no means spectacular. The piece ends unexpectedly, leaving the audience perhaps a bit confused. I sort of liked that.

Overall, the concert experience was positive. I enjoyed the arrangement of pieces that the Quartet + Deveau played, and certainly learned quite a bit about the variety of classical music. I was surprised at how few people came to the concert – the front and center section of Kresge wasn't even filled to its brim. Granted, there were a good number of people who arrived just in time for the last piece of the performance. Admittedly, the applause at the finale of Dvorák's Quintet lasted so long that the group took three bows, and *then* decided to perform a short

encore. Though, I cannot recall much about the encore. I would gladly see either the Jupiter Quartet or Pianist David Deveau again, even if there was an admission fee – the two performing entities have inspired me to attend more classical music concerts.

[1] - <http://www.jupiterquartet.com/biography.html>

[2] - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Quintet_No._2_\(Dvořák\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Quintet_No._2_(Dvořák))