

## Lafayette String Quartet

When I say the words "string quartet", what comes to mind? Chances are you pictured some group you last saw at a wedding, perhaps playing quiet background music, or maybe an image from a British movie, nothing more than pleasant filler behind some romantic scene.

In fact, the string quartet is one of the most important configurations in the history of classical music, and I can't imagine that any group got any better than the Lafayette String Quartet.

Consisting of Anne Elliot-Goldschmidt and Sharon Stanis on violins, Joanna Hood on viola, and Pamela Highbaugh-Aloni on cello, the Lafayette Quartet has been together 30 years. There is something that develops when any group plays together for a long time, an intuitiveness in the interaction that goes beyond verbal communication, and this was clear from the first notes of Schubert's Quartet in E-Flat Major. Not a note out of place, each attack and release, every crescendo and tempo change matched as a single entity, no one instrument standing out unless by intention. This is what 30 years of playing together can achieve.

There was some confusion between the two pieces of the first half, as the musicians left the stage and the lights came up, leading the audience to believe it was intermission. I'm not quite sure what happened there, and the long break between the Schubert and the Shostakovich was not typical.

Yup. Shostakovich. Quartet No.12 in D-Flat Major. Thank goodness Anne spoke before this piece, giving an excellent and needed perspective on the motivation and context of such a challenging selection. And challenging it was, both for the players and the listener, delving into areas of dissonance and technical demand that even my relatively educated musical ear had trouble processing at times. However, when played at the level that these four musicians performed, the movements highlighted both the true mastery of the individual instruments, and the message of the composer living in difficult times. (This may have been the selection in which I heard as many as 2 mistakes for the entire night...). Unfortunately, this work did prove too heavy for some who left at intermission, depriving them of the much more accessible Quartet in E-Flat Major by Beethoven. It too was played beautifully, and as a Beethoven fan myself, this was my favourite work of the evening. From the big bold Maestoso to the stunningly emotional Adagio, it's hard to believe he was deaf when he wrote this music. As an added and very classy touch, the quartet dedicated the piece to Yvonne Topf, who recently passed away after literally decades of service to KCCA.

For those who arrived early, there was once again some music in the foyer, this time provided by a young pianist named Michael Zhao. I only heard the Arabesque #2 by Debussy and Rondo in A-Minor by Mozart, but if what I heard is any indication, this young pianist will be one to watch.

I don't think I'm being too bold in stating that the Lafayette String Quartet is at or near the pinnacle of the format. They simply play the music as well as it can be played, both technically and artistically and I like that they aren't afraid to take on music that stretches the ears of their audience. It's essential to grow as a listener.

Next month is somewhat lighter fare, with CBC's Tom Allen bringing his show "Bohemians in Brooklyn" to the KCT stage. I encourage KCCA members to make sure get a seat for this show, it will I'm sure be uniquely entertaining!

Neville Bowman – musician, actor, composer