

Lafayette Quartet delivers with style

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There are many great pieces of music, but very few that I would consider "perfect." Perfection in the arts may be a chimera, but a few composers have managed to achieve, if only once, a combination of melody, harmony, form and emotion which one simply cannot imagine being improved upon.

Mendelssohn's Octet is certainly of this list and Saturday night's superbly energetic and detailed performance simply reinforced that opinion. The opening movement, despite its fairly relaxed tempo, did not lack in momentum. The slow movement was a study in contrasting textures and dynamics, and I'm not sure I've ever heard the famous "fairy" scherzo taken quite so quickly, but this did not preclude some wonderfully delicate playing and the finale, which set off like a rocket, was sheer exhilaration.

Amidst all of the astonishing innovations of the late Beethoven quartets are some quite gorgeous melodies. Admittedly, they often emerge from the structure of the music and are not thrust to the listener's attention, but they give lie to the opinion that Beethoven was a genius of form who could not write a decent tune to save his life.

A warm summer's evening may not -- indeed did not -- seem the best time to encounter one of these profound masterpieces -- at least, not for the first two movements, despite some excellent playing from the Lafayettes. However, the emotional and spiritual heart of the work, the Heiliger Dankgesang -- taken very slowly indeed -- simply erased any other thought from my mind; until the delectable cello in the coda inspired the preceding paragraph.

Shostakovitch's Prelude and Scherzo for Octet opened the evening in a performance which underlined the stunning modernism of the music. In this early work we can, with hindsight, find most of the composer's mature compositional traits and the personal grief which informed the prelude was all too soon to extend to an entire nation.

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#### REVIEW

What: Victoria Summer Music Festival

Who: Lafayette String Quartet: Ann Elliott-Goldschmid, Sharon Stanis, Joanna Hood, Pamela Highbaugh Aloni Borealis String Quartet: Patricia Shih, Yuel Yawney, Nikita Pogrebnoy, Joel Stobbe

Where: Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

When: Aug. 14

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