



Ariel String Quartet cultivate distinctive refined voice

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How wonderful to be young, on the threshold of a serious, glamorous career in the arts, to be part of a collective of chamber musicians! This is the happy state of the Ariel Quartet, whose members are now enjoying the bloom of professional success. This group, formed in Israel, and currently based in the U.S., has achieved recognition with top prizes in various competitions, including the Banff International String Quartet Competition. Throughout the course of their student years, they cultivated a distinctive, refined voice that will surely be their hallmark as long as they remain a cohesive group.

Each generation engages in the double act of studying standards of the repertoire with experienced masters, then proceeding to a discovery of its own interpretive insights. The Ariel String Quartet took us on a tour of some of the foundation works of quartet literature from the Classical and early Romantic periods. Their vision was clear and carefully controlled, and certainly stylistically accurate. They approached the Mozart (1756-1791) *Quartet in D Major, K. 575*, with a quiet elegance, appropriate to the circumstance in which the piece received its first performance – that is to say, in a manner Mozart would have understood – with fairly delicate proportions, with a contour shaped to the dimension of the drawing room belonging to King of Prussia, Wilhelm II, where, in fact, the composer joined the players, taking the viola part himself.

All beauty, all vitality, all irrepressible velocity – these are the qualities we expect to hear in the compositions of Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), and we did, in the *Quartet in D Major, Op. 44 No. 1*. In a sense, this was the pivotal work of the evening, for it called not only upon the technical resources of the musicians but also on a kind of youthful esprit, the very wellspring of life. The Ariel String Quartet sparkled, never losing their power of concentration or their integrated relationship with each other as they skated across the glistening score. In this work, they proved their readiness now to take on anything in the grand, deep, daring and expansive realm of chamber music.

The Beethoven (1770-1827) *Quartet in E Flat Major, Op. 127* – is a fine point of departure for every aspiring (and every mature) ensemble. The late quartets require emotional and mental stamina, raw energy, and formidable instrumental competence. The Ariels have built their own instrument from the components each musician brings into the mix. Their phrasing is beautiful, the ever so slight breath here and there, which alleviates a metronomic approach to Beethoven's rhythmic intensity, underscores the human dimension of the music. The players interacted seamlessly, articulating their parts, finally and exquisitely knitting those parts into a whole. The musical texts Beethoven left behind invite musicians to a lifetime of study – to absorb, feel, to follow the complex paths he opened to the depths of our inner being and outward to a place of transcendent beauty. The Ariel String Quartet is on the road to a comprehensive grasp of this music – it will be interesting to hear the group again in the future, as they “live” with Beethoven. As Gershon Gerchikov, the violinist who shares in the rotation of first and second violins with Alexandra Kazovsky, explained in his introductory remarks, the Mozart and Mendelssohn quartets preceding the Beethoven were, perhaps, warm-ups for the Beethoven – from a certain standpoint, everything “resolved” into Beethoven. Is that a fair thing to say? Perhaps those works are “slighter” than Opus 127, but each stands as a true gem, complete in itself. What is true is that Beethoven's monumental achievement cannot be digested at one hearing or at one playing. The two violinists and their colleagues, Jan Grüning, viola, and Amit Even-Tov, cello, well-matched as they all are, will soar with this music and give it their own, truly original infusion of life and understanding.

May this quartet thrive and continue to grow!