



## **REVIEW: Ying Quartet Makes Case for Change at CC Summer Fest**

By David Skolnik, April 2, 2012

A professional string quartet on the Packard Hall stage? Certainly this couldn't be a Colorado College Summer Music Festival concert? But it was - albeit the first presentation of the Blooming of Springtime Series, the Festival's strategy to bring the experience of world-class chamber music into the College's regular scholastic calendar.

There were strong ties to the Summer Festival proper (June 7-24) for this concert featuring the Ying Quartet and pianist Sue Grace, Festival Music Director. In recent years, Ying brothers David, viola and Phillip, cello, have become fixtures here in June. At last the ensemble that has made them internationally renowned in the domain of chamber music was in town.

Like other string quartets, the ensemble might spend up to a hundred hours perfecting a musical masterpiece- details are never left to chance and unanimity of sound can be mesmerizing. As a family quartet since 1988, this has been a hallmark of the Ying - sister Janet on second violin and brother Timothy, who left the ensemble in 2008, on first violin. After replacement Frank Huang left to become Concertmaster for the Houston Symphony, Ayano Ninomiya took over this crucial role. No problem here: The Yings plus one proved to be a perfect match.

With no program notes, David effectively took over the role of annotator for the first half of the program- which featured music that likely no one in attendance had ever heard. With Anton Arensky's "2nd String Quartet No. 2, Op. 35a", the Yings took the high artistic ground- a position they were to never come down from all evening. This is an appealing if unbalanced work with echoes of Schubert and Brahms in the first two movements but all Russian in its brief but outspoken finale. The Ying made it into a clinic on the art of chamber music- intimate communication, ideal balance and dramatic unity. Ninomiya was outstanding- easily handling her demanding leading role. The audience, mostly comprised of Festival regulars, was greatly impressed.

True to their ethnic heritage, the Quartet next offered "A Musical Dim Sum: Music of (Contemporary) Chinese-American Composers." They made excellent choices for us rendering works for their medium which offered an array of soundscapes and Asian harmonies likely unbeknownst to the audience. "Song of the Ch'in" by Zhou Long portrayed traditional Chinese folk music; "Pizzicato for String Quartet" by Vivian Fung used Javanese Gamelan music as its inspiration; and "Gobi Gloria" by Lei Liang was a portrait by Mongolian fiddle music and life.

With Robert Schumann's beloved "Piano Quintet" on tap, part two would provide a chance to hear how the Quartet would sound playing a staple of the repertoire. Oh... they sounded great. Sue Grace, always a superb chamber musician, took her cue from the seasoned ensemble playing of the Ying and seemed to be even more in the moment than usual. One has to wonder if she found playing in such an artistic setting more satisfying than in the Summer Fest's musical explosion.

The Quintet was a spectacular musical celebration. It was sheer ecstasy witnessing Phillip and David sharing the lyric theme of the first movement; the erratic drama of the "slow" movement was thrilling; Sue Grace was stalwart in the episodic Scherzo; and the entire ensemble rocked us into glory in the roller coaster finale- the Hendrix fan's attending the same evening's Pikes Peak Center Tribute Concert could not have possibly heard anything more exciting!

Please, Mrs. Grace, bring the Ying back- anytime will do.