



Chamber Music Monterey Bay presents the Ying Quartet

by [Joe Sekon](#)
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On Saturday, March 23, 2013, the stylish, charismatic Ying String Quartet performed at Sunset Center Theater in Carmel. The Quartet members are Ayano Ninomiya and Janet Ying, violins, Phillip Ying viola and David Ying cello. This ensemble is “Quartet-in-residence at the Eastman School of Music” and one of today’s most distinguished string quartets. Its members seem to have the firm conviction that music should be an important part of everyday life, and I couldn’t agree more! The Ying Quartet has performed in many diverse settings including juvenile prisons, schools and the White House in Washington. D.C.

The Quartet performed three works: String Quartet in C Major, Op. 20, No. 2 (1772), by Franz Josef Haydn, String Quartet No. 2, Concussion Theory (2012), West Coast Premiere by Kenji Bunch and String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, D. 810, “Death and the Maiden” (1824) by Franz Peter Schubert.

The Ying Quartet performed these works with technical mastery, musical insight, vivid imagination and tireless enthusiasm. Among the huge library of wonderful compositions produced by Haydn, he considered the eighteen string quartets produced between 1769 and 1772 his “true” quartets, and the C major Quartet is one of the great masterpieces from this output. The Ying Quartet delicately and beautifully linked phrases together throughout the work as though they were cast in molten liquid, all phrased in perfect dynamic balance.

The Quartet is involved with what they call “Life Music”, in which this multi- talented ensemble commissions composers and offers them the opportunity to create works that express a wide variety of innovative musical concepts. Such a work is “Concussion Theory,” a four-movement type of art music that attempts to express an extra-musical narrative, commonly known as “Program Music.” The “Dust Bowl” of the 1930s served as the inspiration for this work. The U.S. Government financed desperate experiments to encourage clouds to produce rain, one of which involved exploding dynamite in the sky in hopes of producing rain. The work’s four movements are *No Man’s Land*, *Black Sunday*, *Concussion Theory* and *A Gentle Rain*. The first movement was marked by impressive, delicate viola and violin harmonics at *pianissimo* levels, while the cello entered with pizzicato creating a sparse, abstract texture – this was so subtle there was no sense of pressure being applied from the bows to the strings. The Quartet’s technique was so delicate the sound simply emanated as if from some cosmic place. A tonal hymn-like texture created moments of somber lament that transformed into a highly active energy of bizarre allusions. The contrast of high and low delicate lines between the violins and cello was really effective. “Concussion Theory” was a musically impressive work that I would like to hear again.

The Schubert Quartet we heard is but one of his many masterworks that is reminiscent of the ever-popular *Der Erlkönig*, another piece of program music. The four members of the Ying Quartet realized its many moods in full, rich narrative – in the process displaying incredible virtuosity and superb musicianship. The second movement evolved as a somber funeral dirge conceived in precise four-part unison that made a statement beyond music.

The Ying String Quartet is not to be missed. Special thanks to Amy Anderson, President and Dana Werdmuller, Executive Director and the Board of Directors for engaging this wonderful Quartet!