



From the Pacifica Quartet, a great night of Beethoven at DU's Gates Hall

Sabine Kortals
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It's always fascinating to try to discern and articulate exactly what makes a string quartet – or any ensemble – stand apart.

In the case of the Pacifica Quartet in Sunday afternoon's Friends of Chamber Music program at Gates Concert Hall, a synthesis of chemistry, dynamism and artistic sensibility among its members made for the most meaningful interpretation of Beethoven in recent memory.

Kicking off the Friends' ambitious (and admirable) presentation of the complete cycle of Beethoven string quartets, the Pacifica members were at their best in three works that probed exuberant emotional heights and intense melancholy.

From the opening of Quartet No. 6 in B-flat Major, Op 18, No. 6, first violinist Simin Ganatra ^[8] set the tone for the evening with an incisive attack and deeply-felt musicianship that she shares with the other members – her husband, cellist Brandon Vamos, second violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson and violist Masumi Per Rostad.

Having experienced numerous performances by the quartet over the years – both in Denver and in New York – I've always appreciated their individual and collective vigor and vitality. But never before was I so engaged by their cohesion, commitment and energy, especially in the Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 95.

Most engrossing, however, was the demanding Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132, comprising the entire second half of the program. Here, the quartet wowed the audience with equal parts passion, precision, artistic insight and unflagging endurance.

Pacific String Quartet continues its tour of Beethoven, with its own style

By Sabine Kortals
September 20, 2012

Opening the Friends of Chamber Music's 59th season at Gates Concert Hall on Wednesday, the Pacific String Quartet presented a musical marathon of Beethoven works before a full house.

Continuing its presentation all 16 Beethoven string quartets, the Grammy award-winning ensemble delivered all the emotional punch and atmospheric effect of the composer's Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5 and his Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130 with the Grosse Fuge, Op. 133.

The youthful and formidable foursome nimbly demonstrates the artistic capacity and technical mastery required to lay bare the intricacies and range of Beethoven's stylistic development.

In the fifth quartet in A Major – replete with references to Mozart and Haydn – first violinist Simin Ganatra boldly set the tone and tempo for the work's overt drive, vigor and virtuosity. And in the light and agile Menuetto movement, the quartet deftly emphasized Beethoven's dramatic use of silence and truncated phrases.

After intermission, the unique six-movement Op. 130 quartet provided a platform for the ensemble to come together in some beautiful music that requires shared intensity among its performers. In this late quartet (one of Beethoven's last major compositions), Ganatra – along with violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson, violist Masumi Per Rostad and cellist Brandon Vamos – revealed the composer's pioneering aspect expressed through his musical wit and seemingly paradoxical tones and tempos.

Most memorable was the quartet's searing rendition of the exceedingly difficult Grosse Fuge. To deliver the work's variegated fugal themes, interpretive cohesion and consistency among the players is paramount – qualities that well define what sets the Pacifica String Quartet apart.