



Zorá String Quartet The Boston Musical Intelligencer

FEBRUARY 7, 2018/RACHAEL FULLER IN REVIEWS

Archaic Deities at the Gardner

Published in 1827 as a set of five string quartets, Beethoven's String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132 came as a revelation to a young Felix Mendelssohn, who immediately dove into writing his own String Quartet in A Minor (Op. 13). The Zorá String Quartet brought these two standards new life during its Boston debut in Calderwood Hall at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on Sunday afternoon.

Winner of a 2105 Young Concert Artists Award, the foursome, now Graduate Quartet in Residence at Curtis Institute, comprises Dechopol Kowintaweewat and Hsuan-Hao Hsu, violins; Pablo Muñoz Salido, viola; and Zizai Ning, cello.

Beethoven typically avoided using A minor as a principal key, having only used it in his Op. 23 Violin Sonata and in the Kreutzer Sonata (though even this is largely A major). Like his other late quartets (Opp. 130-135), the opening line creeps into existence. Zorá followed suit, transforming the first movement into a youthful, energetic, hyper-passionate dialogue. The dark opening four-note statement begins on the tonic in the cello, then passes to the first violin in a restatement on the dominant. Although this teases at the idea of a fugue, it does not materialize, and instead permeates murkiness. Zorá's character stayed somber, though an attentive energy hung in the air, each player dedicated to ensemble-ship and musical conversation.

The third movement, *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lidischen Tonart* (Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity by a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode), brought the most tender and matured sound from the young Zorá Quartet, whose clear understanding of harmonic and melodic motion in this section came to fruition. The roughly 20-minute hymn, which is proportionally much longer than the remaining movements of the quartet, includes a yearning, archaic undertaking many have attributed the convalescent to Beethoven's own suffering, who gives thanks to God for letting him live through his deafness. Some have also explained this as an acceptance of his coming death and an acknowledgement of living eternally. The fourth movement, a light march, soared into the final rondo movement, once again a thrilling interpretation from Zorá. As bright and mature as their sound

Page 1 of 2



Zorá String Quartet

was, Beethoven's late works grow with lots of time and reevaluating, and personally, I cannot wait to see Zorá Quartet continue to study and play Op. 132 in 20 years and again in 40 years.

Mendelssohn composed his A Minor String Quartet the same year as Beethoven's death. Quite interesting is his own interpretation of Beethoven's late quartet, which Mendelssohn transformed into a love song, built on the same motives of his song "Frage" and combined with elements of Beethoven's Op. 132. His quartet begins with the same tranquility as Beethoven's Thanksgiving Hymn, although it arguably mirrors the opening four-note cell in the first movement of Op. 132 before bursting into a brilliant Allegro vivace.

In the Adagio non lento, the lush melodic lines stretched and twisted in the most satisfying way. This tone set by Zorá Quartet was a welcomed change, leading to a stomach-dropping fugue that turned from tense and fraught to buoyant. Ning's cello supplied an expressive, propelling bass line. Kowintaweewat's violin lent a deeply heartfelt and warm soprano. Intermezzo. Allegro con moto – Allegro di molto is another archaic nod to the past, evoking a serious Baroque dance before altering into a playful middle section, much like the fairies of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, composed around the same time. Again, Zorá's interpretation began much slower than expected, but its frolicsome next section flew by, offering a compelling contrast.

Played attacca from the third movement, the Presto zipped along, as tumultuous as a Beethoven finale should ever begin. Once the dust settles from the bombastic beginning, a compassionate theme emerges, tipping its hat to the first movement and including elements of Mendelssohn's "Frage." In comparison to Mendelssohn's other works, this movement feels more intimate and devastatingly personal, and Zorá Quartet matched its eloquence and quietude masterfully.

In short, Zorá Quartet did not fail to impress. We look forward to its next Boston appearance.