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## Calder Quartet offer polished performance at the Peace Center

By Paul Hyde • Contributing writer • May 9, 2010

Saturday evening with the Calder Quartet proved to be a fine way to end a day of Artisphere, Greenville's fine arts festival. Outside, the weather had been well-nigh perfect. Inside the Peace Center's Gunter Theatre, the music-making was well-nigh the same.

Looking like a sort of classical early Beatles, with their dark suits and skinny ties, the youthful Los Angeles-based Calder Quartet offered a concert notable for technical confidence and a keen musical sensibility shared by all four performers. Their performance truly was a conversation among equals.

In the first half of the program, the engaging quartet provided a graceful, polished and thoroughly persuasive account of Franz Schubert's Quartet No. 15 in G Major, a quartet of epic proportions — longer, in fact, than some Beethoven symphonies.

Kudos particularly go to first violinist Benjamin Jacobson for deftly negotiating the stratospheric passages in the piece's first movement with the utmost delicacy. Cellist Eric Byers, meanwhile, was a standout in the piece's second movement, rendering the elegiac cello solo with simple eloquence. The piece concluded with a breezy account of the irresistible finale.

If the first half of the program was devoted to 19th century charm, the second half of the program was given over to 20th century angst. Two pieces tested the virtuosic mettle of the performers. They rose to the challenge.

Igor Stravinsky's Three Pieces for String Quartet was written in 1914, a year after that composer's revolutionary "Rite of Spring." The brief string quartet contains some of the same rhythmic urgency and austere mysticism as does "Rite" — only in miniature. Particularly pleasing was the piece's second movement, with its antic spirit said to be inspired by a clown Stravinsky had seen in London.

Last on the program, the Calder offered an impassioned account of Czech composer Leos

Janacek's String Quartet No. 2, subtitled "Intimate Letters" and inspired by the elderly composer's love for a woman 38 years his junior. It is a mercurial piece filled with the anguish of unrequited love. The haunting third movement and searing fourth movement — ending on a cry of despair — proved particularly effective.

The young musicians of the Calder Quartet are known for their often bold and innovative programming. Their future careers will be exciting to watch and one hopes they'll return to Greenville soon.

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