

Fine Arts Quartet

Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival in Bad Oldesloe
July 2006

A CONCERT -- OUTSTANDINGLY BEAUTIFUL

STORMY APPLAUSE FOR THE OFFERINGS OF THE FOUR EXCEPTIONAL MUSICIANS

THE ARTISTS PRAISE THE ACOUSTICS OF THE CHURCH AS WELL AS THE PUBLIC

Martina Tabel
Bad Oldesloe

A silken sound fills Oldesloe's Peter-Paul Church. Mozart approaches, softly and gently, without much pretense. Just simply beautiful, wondrously beautiful. Even the cellist is lifted a few centimeters above the floor when playing the Hoffmeister quartet, as he admits later, smiling winningly. It is the second concert of the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival in Bad Oldesloe. And indeed, festival atmosphere prevails. Informal conversations are carried on in the evening sun under sun shades and with the help of a small glass of champagne. People make their presence known and greet one another. Soon they enter the church, which is sold out. The lights are turned down and the audience falls silent. And the Fine Arts Quartet begins, tenderly.

To begin with, such reticent tenderness requires both courage and skill. But that is no problem for the four elegant men. They've played together for decades. Their repertoire consists of two hundred works, which they can pull out of their pockets, as it were. Security and self-confidence prevail. There is complete consensus -- phrasing, pauses, dynamics -- everything comes across as if performed by one person.

Of course, routine plays a role, but professionalism far more so. "Before the concert I spent an hour on the Mozart. There was something I had discovered. And I absolutely wanted to get that across in the performance," said Wolfgang Laufer. He hadn't mentioned anything to his colleagues, but Ralph Evans, the first violinist, Efim Boico, the second violin, and the violist Yuri Gandelsmann understood the cellist anyway. "They reacted instantly; nothing more was necessary," says Wolfgang Laufer and demonstrates the wordless nodding of the head indicating the mutual consensus.

To perfect so incomparable a career as that achieved by the Fine Arts Quartet requires a polished professionalism. But that isn't all. "We enjoyed it," said the violist.

HOMAGE TO SCHUMANN, SHOSTAKOVICH, AND MOZART

He had a great time -- good acoustics, a fantastic audience. "A great atmosphere." The other musicians evidently had the same experience -- quite astonishing, considering that this was the fifth week of a tour of a total of 24 concerts all across Europe. Thus it turned out to be an impressive homage to the jubilees of three composers: Mozart -- 250, Shostakovich -- 100, and Schumann, who died 150 years ago. To be sure, his String Quartet in A Major was music that was not quite on the same level. It seemed that the conflicted romantic could not quite compete with the dynamic Russian. The Fine Arts Quartet's performance of Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 11 in f minor was breathtaking.