

New Zealand Quartet in Daytona Beach
" ... as near to perfect as it surely is possible to get."

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Quartet hits high note for new season

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DAYTONA BEACH The New Zealand String Quartet set a fine tone for the fresh cultural season Friday with its wide-ranging, profoundly nuanced Central Florida Cultural Endeavors concert. Violinist Helena Pohl was a powerhouse in Beethoven's String Quartet in B flat major, Opus 18, No. 6, a massive work that allowed the four musicians from Victoria University in Wellington to revel in their classical roots.

Gossamer without being merely glossy, the string quartet's intricate sonic patterns explored the depths of human emotions crisply, tenderly and, always, with great subtlety. In the able hands of Pohl and her colleagues (violinist Douglas Beilman, violist Gillian Ansell and cellist Rolf Gjelsten) Hugo Wolf's "Italian Serenade" was a jaunty, exquisitely paced romantic idyll. Its ornate passages skipped and spun, celebrating both Wolf's eloquent ballad to the beloved and the New Zealand quartet's absolute mastery of its frolicking love-drunk recitatives.

One of the program's highlights came next, and won the full attention of the near-capacity audience at Our Lady of Lourdes Church. In keeping with the quartet's goal of bringing New Zealand music to the world, the musicians produced an amazing variety of exotic sounds and rhythms in "Three Transcriptions."

The 1987 work by New Zealander Jack Body resonated with chords from China, Madagascar and Bulgaria, played on contemporary strings that mimicked to such ethnic instruments as the southern Chinese Long-ge, a Jew's harp with three metal blades. As exquisite as the classical and romantic pieces that preceded them, "Transcriptions" opened doors on the traditions of remote cultures.

Just so did the quartet's performance of Bedrich Smetana's emotionally laden String Quartet No. 1 in E minor, the autobiographical "From My Life", offer more than enjoyment. The string quartet brilliantly and achingly, expresses his devastation at his loss in what Smetana called "a tone-picture of my life."

Introducing the work, violinist Beilman emphasized the work's pathos; performing it, the quartet explored the beauty of Smetana's memories, translated into music. The New Zealander's presentation of "From My Life" was warm, precise in every note, light and brisk. It was, like the rest of the ensemble's thoughtful, rich program, as near to perfect as it surely is possible to get. Each work became a living thing, constantly in the process of re-creation, serious and virtuosic.