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Final performances of CSS concerts

By Bill Haxton

On Monday evening, June 20, as night gathered over Three Rivers, I wandered over to the sanctuary at the Community Presbyterian Church to prepare for tomorrow's concert. I was surprised to see, and hear, a rehearsal of the Schubert String Quintet.

I was listening to the opening bars of the second movement, some of the most ethereally beautiful music ever composed. I sat in the back pew, unseen and completely mesmerized.

Schubert completed this piece only a few weeks before his premature death at the age of 31, and perhaps because he knew he was dying and wrote himself into this music, his C Major Quintet is one of the greatest chamber music compositions ever created.



Instrumentally, it features not a second viola but a second cello, which gives it a supremely rich, deep texture, especially when the two cellists performing it are David Requiro and Diego Miralles.

The two violinists are national prize winner Danielle Belen and the San Francisco Opera's Elbert Tsai. British superstar Sarah Sutton is on viola.

The vast first movement features cello duets and an immortal second theme that is perhaps the highlight of the entire piece. Following the monumental opening movement, the second movement's unearthly tranquility is punctuated by moments of fierce denial.

This gives way to a boisterous third movement designed to wake anyone lulled into excessive tranquility. The sometimes frantic fourth movement sounds like a man racing desperately against time, which Schubert knows is running out.

Like Beethoven's Ninth Symphony or Bach's D Minor Partita, this is one of a very small handful of compositions that can be truly called universal and immortal.

The rest of the program is also superb — Beethoven's String Quartet in D, Opus 18, No. 3, and Arno Babajanian's passionate Piano Trio in F# Minor.

Following tradition, this year's Center Stage Strings Music Camp and Festival will close Sunday at 4 p.m. with a spectacular display of student performers, many of whom will likely go on to highly successful professional careers.

Start to finish, it's a great program and includes the world famous Mendelssohn Octet. This is not a doubled quartet, but a true eight-part work, with textures, counterpoints, and complex harmonies you'd expect to find in a full blown symphony. To this day, the Octet remains the finest composition in that form.

Saturday's concert — Chamber Music Extravaganza, performed by the mega-talented CSS faculty — is at 7 p.m. at Community Presbyterian Church. Sunday's concert — Student Solo and Chamber Music Recital — is at 4 p.m. Tickets are still available at Chump's for Saturday's performances; the Sunday concert is free.

Come help us end the camp on the highest of notes.

Bill Haxton is on the Center Stage Strings board of directors.