EMERSON STRING QUARTET


BY ALLON G. PERCUS

In the season following its tenth anniversary, the Emerson String Quartet has shown that it deserves its place as one of the world's leading string ensembles. Its performance on Friday evening displayed a rare combination of precision, vitality and spirit.

Seeger, Druckman, Dutton and Finckel hit the ground running with the Allegro spirituoso of Haydn's Quartet in F major, Op. 74, No. 2 ("Salomon"). The exposition had both a complete and a satisfying sound; from the animation of the artists, their masterful understanding of the piece was evident. The coda and trio of the second movement was a perfect blend of Haydn's light touch and Schubert's profound chamber music, with the quartet maintaining a clear sense of line and the thematic development.

To many, the premiere of Harbison's String Quartet No. 2 was the main attraction of the concert. This piece, commissioned for the 150th anniversary of the Harvard Musical Association, successfully attempted to recall some of the musical color of the Baroque era before the time of the string quartet. Unlike so many of the works of contemporary composers, however, Harbison's quartet begins with music that was not only thought-provoking but pleasant as well.

There was no doubt about the affinity that the performers ultimately came to have for this new work. Harbison's free movements of widely varying form and structure held together admirably. The artists were able to lend it a surprising coherence, without which the quartet might have been far less pleasant to hear.

Starting with the second movement, Concertante, the satisfying aspects of the music started to give way to a more agitated sound. Happily, there was a brief respite from this in the third movement, Rievolute; a pause allowed for a change of pace in the mood. A convincing musical climax soon began to take form, and it was later released gently, with restraint.

Schubert's Quartet in G Major, D. 887 was probably the high point of the evening. The quartet glided through the Allegro molto moderato with refined mastery for bringing out the subtleties of contrasting passages of piano and forte. The Andante con moto, with its quieting of the second violin and viola, suggested rippling water, had the audience completely submersed.

As with many of Schubert's works, the first and second movements were mere hints of what was to come, and the group's performance of the Scherzo and Allegro assai were no less astonishing. The recurrence of useful and colorful melodies by no means felt repetitive; the audience was completely charmed. It proclaimed its appreciation with thunderous applause at the end of the concert.

While Harbison's piece may have gotten weaker towards the end, at no point during that or any other piece was there any question of the Emerson String Quartet's proficiency. As a group of young and energetic musicians, they had the skill necessary to exhibit the vivacity that one finds in the music. Their performance was a testament to the importance of this new work.

Tickets are on sale at the Technology Community Association, W20-450 in the Student Center. Office hours posted on the door. Call x3-4885 for further information.

The Tech Performing Arts Series, a service for the entire MIT community, from The Tech, MIT's student newspaper, in conjunction with the Technology Community Association, MIT's student community service organization.

CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

F. John Adams will conduct the Boston Premiere Ensemble in a performance of the Christmas Oratorio. Emmanuel Church, December 5 at 4pm. MIT price: $6.

PRO ARTE

The sweet-voiced Jayne West will join Frank Kelley, Larry Hill, the Back Bay Chorale and the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra for what promises to be a joyous performance of Haydn's The Creation. Sanders Theatre, December 13 at 3pm. MIT price: $6.

John Boorman's completion as a film director and auteur

Iain Bannen, Sebastian Rico-Erdewards,

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