

# Tokyo String Quartet: Organic, Charming and Engaging in Birmingham Concert

By Michael Huebner

Listen to the Tokyo String Quartet, and you may hear a bit of old Europe.

That may sound contradictory considering the quartet's origins in 1960s Japan, but there was an intangible, understated sagacity to its sound that seemed to bring Joseph Haydn and Robert Schumann directly into Brock Recital Hall Tuesday night.

The four Stradivarius instruments may have played a big role. They have a sweet, woody, organic quality that, when played together by these stellar musicians, can render an ancient ambiance.

Or perhaps it was the non-flashy, nearly stoic, egalitarian playing that brought a flood of old world charm and ingratiated the audience at the sold-out concert.

Swells of crescendos in the opening movement of Haydn's Quartet in F major, Op. 77, No. 2, led to delicate cross-rhythms and charming duos in the Menuetto. There was strength in their subtleties, a rhythmic pliability that was enticing and engaging. The finale was vibrant, never overstated, and marked by

perfectly calibrated phrasing and impeccable balance.

Samuel Barber's thick-textured Quartet, Op. 11, was appropriately moody. The Molto Adagio was more down to earth than its better known version for string orchestra, "Adagio for Strings." The Molto Allegro finale was a convincing segue.

Cellist Clive Greensmith's solos in the Barber and Schumann's Quartet in A major, Op. 41, No. 3, had a vocal quality, sounding much like a fine baritone singing art songs. The gentle romanticism of Schumann quartet's opening movement led to a series of sighs and breathless breaks in the Assai agitato. First violinist Martin Beaver's ability to sustain lines, without dampening the emerging lines from second violinist Kikuei Ikeda

and violist Kazuhide Isomura, came through best in the third movement. The finale retained a kinetic, yet light and airy feel, despite a strange buzz coming from the direction of the instruments.

A bold, confident rendition of the second movement of Debussy's String Quartet, Op. 10 was offered as an encore.



## Tokyo String Quartet

Martin Beaver and  
Kikuei Ikeda, violinists;  
Kazuhide Isomura, violist;  
Clive Greensmith, cellist

☆☆☆☆☆

Brock Recital Hall  
Tuesday  
Presented by Birmingham Chamber Music  
Society and Davis Guest Artist Series