

NUVO

IVCI & Ensemble Music present Kelemen Quartet

2002 IVCI gold medalist returns with his own string quartet

By Tom Aldridge



Kelemen Quartet

If you examine the subsequent careers of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis laureates, you see lots of diversity in their respective career paths. Some of the top tier ones get to solo with guest orchestras long enough to become marquee names on the tour--e.g. Augustin Hadelich, 2006 gold medalist. Others play in or become concertmasters of major symphony orchestras. 2002 IVCI gold medalist Barnabás Kelemen had taken, in 2000, a different, and possibly unique tack of founding his own string quartet, so named and employing other Hungarian players. In the subsequent 15 years, the [Kelemen Quartet](#) has received plaudits from over the world for its high musicianship order and its "electrifying" delivery. I heard nothing to dissuade me from that view in this, their first Indy appearance.

The Kelemen Quartet offered a program which could be titled "late in different musical periods"--meaning three string quartets written with full maturity in the styles of their respective eras. First we heard the second of Haydn's last full set of six quartets, his Quartet in D Minor, Op. 76 No. 2 ("Quinten"). Next came Six Moment Musicaux, Op. 44, by György Kurtág, completed in 2005 and written in a late avant-garde style. And finally Béla Bartók's Quartet No. 5 of the landmark six quartets to come from his pen over his adulthood, defining his five-movement "arch-form."

Haydn's Op. 76 No. 2 gets its title (in German) from the "falling fifths" predominating as its first-movement theme. Actually the theme has two pairs of falling fifths, the second one heard a "fourth" below the first one. Then Haydn elaborates on that series in a most erudite manner, making it one of the more scholarly of his late quartet series. Violinist Kelemen, assisted by 2nd violinist Katalin Kokas, violist Gábor Homoky and cellist László Fenyő played the Haydn with a near white (no vibrato) tonality, which worked well in conjunction with their excellent balance, spot-on precision and dynamic nuances.

For the final two works, Kokas and Homoky traded places and instruments, both having been labeled violinist and violist. The six, brief Kurtág pieces were a bit of a challenge, much in the manner of Webern's short 12-tone pieces of nearly a century earlier. . .except these were not 12-tone; whatever discipline they were written under completely escaped me. It's perhaps noteworthy that the Kurtág oeuvre had scarcely been explored in recording prior to 2000, including no recording whatever of this work. It appears that his work is now more appreciated--in some circles. As far as I could tell, the Kelemen group sailed through the six in under 20 minutes.

To go from Kurtág to Bartók is like stepping onto a much more familiar road, one in which we hear our foursome gel into giving us rich, full-bodied, yet well controlled tones in all movements, such as the Scherzo -- at the top of the composer's "arch." And in the little ditty of a tune near the end of the fifth movement, which Bartók eases into and out of before one could catch his/her breath. Yes, Bartók is craggy and thorny, but the Kelemen players knew how to get the most out of him. Oct. 20; *Indiana Landmarks Center*