

NUVO

IVCI Laureate Series features Michelangelo String Quartet

2nd Laureate concert in a row hosts a quartet with an IVCI connection

By [Tom Aldridge](#)



Michelangelo String Quartet

This Tuesday it was the [Michelangelo Quartet](#) with first violinist Mihaela Martin, who was the IVCI's very first gold medalist from 1982. The latter quartet group featured the two finest chamber works written by their composers: Haydn's String Quartet, No. 1 in G, Op. 77, No. 1, his penultimate quartet written in 1799 when he was 67, and Schumann's Piano Quintet in E-flat, Op. 44 with pianist Chih-Yi Chen joining the Michelangelo foursome.

In fact Haydn's Op. 77, No. 1 may be his finest instrumental composition period. He had completed his six Op. 76 quartets the year before, and Op. 77 was to be a cycle of six additional ones. But his strength was sapped after only two had been finished, and Op. 77 No. 2 lacked the inspiration of No. 1, which had placed Haydn on a pedestal above everyone except for Beethoven and his five late quartets—and possibly one or two of Mozart's. All four movements of Op. 77 No. 1 seem to have been supremely inspired, especially the Adagio and the rollicking, fugal Finale, marked Presto. It should have been the final work performed, but of course, like all Haydn, it came first, to which the following works couldn't quite live up.

Schumann's Piano Quintet is indeed Schumann's finest chamber work but not his finest genre work (for which his A Minor Piano Concerto gets the nod). The opening movement soars with lyric beauty while the slow movement is dominated by a slow, soft, interrupted, catacomb-like march, used as apropos background in the 1934 Universal horror film, *The Black Cat*. Its rhythm is identical to the so-called Providence motive which opens Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. The Schumann work concluded the program.

In between came a Beethoven quartet which wasn't the best of anything but was certainly a substantial entry as part of his five middle-period quartets: the String Quartet No. 8 in E Minor, Op. 59 No. 2—one of three dedicated to Count "Razumovsky," who had commissioned them. Its so-called trio of the Scherzo movement contains the Russian theme "Slava," which later came to dominate the opening act of Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*.

Having been founded in 2002, the Michelangelo players did a very commendable job with these three works—good ensemble work, great balance, great precision, but with nuances on the subtle side, traits which worked especially well in the Haydn masterpiece. Very few quartet groups have their vibrati in sync. Our players succeeded part of the time. *Nov. 10; Indiana History Center*