

**Sensational debut by four young ladies from Canada  
at the philharmonic chamber concerts in Bremen**

## **Precise musical expression and wide emotional arc**

By Ute Schalz-Laurenze, BREMEN. The *Philharmonische Gesellschaft* (Philharmonic Society) had the great idea to “piggyback” on to the results of major competitions for their chamber concerts. In light of the plethora of truly fabulous string quartets, the young people who win such a competition merit extra curiosity.

*[Picture caption: Setting standards: The Cecilia Quartet.]*

This time around, it was four young ladies from Canada who won first prize at the 10<sup>th</sup> Banff competition. If it is already hard enough to find the right words to describe exceptional interpretations, it seems a completely impossible task this time. We heard an almost unimaginable level of articulation, communication, timbres, clarity of structure and, again and again, a deep musical rhetoric second to none.

Opening with the string quartet in G major, KV 387 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Min-Jeong Koh and Sarah Nematallah, violin, Caitlin Boyle, viola, and Rachel Desoer, cello, made it wonderfully clear that rhetorical exactitude of each individual note and wide, spontaneous, extreme emotional arcs do not need to be mutually exclusive. The way these two elements complemented each other and were even amplified to create theatrical drama sets new standards for the interpretation of this music. Admirable was also the balance between the individual instruments at their highest level of expression – it is incredible to watch and hear how each of the artists seems to be playing for her life – and the unified expression of the ensemble, into which such individuality rejoins perfectly every time.

Dmitri Shostakovich’s 7<sup>th</sup> string quartet, written 1960 after his wife had died of cancer – appeared as an oppressive lament, especially the almost frenzied interpretation of the fuge as an “expression of mortal fear”, as described so aptly by musicologist Alfred Beaujean. A humorous addition was provided by the “Commedia dell’Arte” figures by Canadian composer Ana Sokolovic, written as a small commission piece for the competition. Even though there was a break after the piece by Sokolovic, it was still fantastic to experience how fast the ladies are able to change the “tone”. After all, the following piece, Alban Berg’s “Lyric Suite” – rightfully described as “one of the masterpieces of musical literature” by Pierre Boulez - requires profound despair. This piece is a poignant expression of Alban Berg’s tragic love to Hanna Fuchs, encrypted in purely musical terms and only deciphered when the corresponding contents were found in Hanna Fuchs’ estate in 1979.

Not only do we want to remember the Cecilia Quartet, we also want to hear them again in Bremen!