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**(Milwaukee, WI)**

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**Miró Quartet's Romance of Chamber Music**

By Rick Walters

Frankly Music is known for bringing top musicians to town. Occasionally, it presents a visiting ensemble to perform without artistic director Frank Almond, as was the case last week with the return appearance of the Miró Quartet at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. There’s a reason the string quartet was asked back: It’s really good.

The set-up was a little unconventional, with the cellist seated next to the first violin and the second violin across from the first. This group plays with highly refined and balanced ensemble and plenty of subtle inflections and nuances. The completely in-sync taper of the sound at the end of the phrase was continually noticeable and admirable.

They called it a program of romance, since all three pieces were written when the composers were in love. Robert Schumann’s Quartet in A Minor was the first of three string quartets written in the year after his marriage to Clara Wieck. The music is full of earnest passion, well-rendered with clarity of intention by the players (Daniel Ching and William Fedkenheuer, violin; John Largess, viola; Joshua Gindele, cello).

Any music by Czech composer Leoš Janáček is a bit of a wild ride, taking unexpected turns constantly. He wrote his Quartet No. 2, *Intimate Letters*, as a “manifesto on love”—a musical depiction of his correspondence with a much younger woman. Shifts in texture and direction occur every few measures with urgent bursts of emotion. This music could only be played successfully by an accomplished group and must have required a great deal of rehearsal. It paid off in this colorful performance.

Felix Mendelssohn’s Quartet in A Minor was written at age 17 when he was in love for the first time. There is sweetness and elegance in it, and parts of it have the fleet scurry common to this composer. It was so wonderful to hear the strings plucked so perfectly together in pizzicato.

While sitting in that quietly attentive audience I realized how good it is to experience the civility of classical music in a time when the public discourse feels so disruptive.