

From Cleveland Classical.com A Friday evening
at ENCORE Chamber Music (June 14, 2019)
by Daniel Hathaway

That the Cavani String Quartet, even in its transitional state, continues to draw a large and devoted following attests to its long and close relationship with the many students the ensemble mentored during its tenure at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Those fans, along with current ENCORE Chamber Music participants, packed the music room at Gilmour Academy's Tudor House on Friday, June 14 for a program of Mozart, Martinů, and Dvořák. Violinists Annie Fullard and Mari Sato, violist Eric Wong, and guest cellist Amit Even-Tov launched the evening with a robust and cheerful account of Mozart's Quartet in G, K . 387, preceded by Fullard's reading of a letter from the composer to his mentor, to whom the six "Haydn" quartets were dedicated.

The Cavani produced a plush sound in the intimate space, pointing up the odd sforzandi in the menuet and the ornate first violin line in the Andante. The finale began unassumingly, but quickly heated up.

Fullard and Wong returned for Martinů's Three Madrigals, which Fullard noted were written for the sister and brother duo of Lillian and Joseph Fuchs, adding that the pieces had a Cleveland connection: Fuchs was concertmaster of The Cleveland Orchestra from 1926 to 1940.

The Madrigals were charmingly conversational, the first rhythmically vital with dialogues of varying length. The second trades trills back and forth before the violin takes off on a melodic tack over viola pizzicatos, then contrasts nervous chromatic scales before the two instruments reach a harmonious detente. Beginning with a highly inflected theme, number three ends in ferocity.

Eric Wong was spokesperson for Dvořák's "American" Quartet, reminding the audience of its origin with the composer's pilgrimage to the colony of fellow Bohemians in Spillville, Iowa, his use of American spirituals and birdsong (a scarlet tanager, to be precise), and his fascination with trains, whose rhythms inspired and energized the finale. The Cavani gave the piece a vibrant, loving performance, earning a strong ovation from the crowd.