



From left: the Borealis Quartet's Patricia Shih, Yuel Yawney, Shih-Lin Chen, and Nikita Pogrebnoy performed with precision.

# Borealis brings clear bravado

## MUSIC

### BOREALIS STRING QUARTET

At Christ Church Cathedral on Sunday, August 10, as part of Festival Vancouver. No remaining performances

◆ On a hot and sunny late-summer afternoon, the last place most Vancouverites want to be for hours on end is a stuffy downtown church hall, their bare, sweaty legs slowly and painfully adhering to uncomfortable, wooden seats. Luckily for Festival Vancouver, August 10 turned out to be an especially gloomy day, and Christ Church Cathedral welcomed a healthy-sized audience for the first performance in its one-day, three-concert extravaganza, Spectacular String Quartets.

The Borealis String Quartet's first violinist Patricia Shih, second violinist Yuel Yawney, violist Nikita Pogrebnoy, and cellist Shih-Lin Chen are a young and energetic—not to mention attractive—group, and they set the bar high with a program featuring the world premiere of *String Quartet No. 2* by Okanagan-based composer Imant Raminsh, along with Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quartet in F minor, Op. 95*.

Dramatic and highly accessible, Raminsh's composition proved an engaging work, filled with rich textures and twisting, changeable moods. Written in three movements with a short andante introduction, it opened with a pleasing repeated-note figure that slowly expanded, meandering through chromatic semitones and building to the lively, animated allegretto first movement. A rhythmic, almost seasick lilt carried this section forward to a lyrical *andante con moto*

second movement, in which a delicate and tentative solo line was interpreted by each instrument amid lush voicing. The final andante movement echoed the introduction and gave way to a bouncy, rollicking dance, which crescendoed with a flourish to end the piece.

Next came the Beethoven, which, it is said, the composer never intended to be performed publicly. A compact work, it is filled with outrageous outbursts, angry gestures, and, at times, challenging atonalities. But Borealis, led by the compellingly emotive Shih, attacked the work with confidence, precision, and control, bringing clarity to a complex piece.

For his part, Raminsh appeared more than satisfied with the care given to his creation, and was among the first to leap to their feet at the concert's end. He was quickly joined by the rest of the hall's inhabitants, for whom the grey skies outside meant nothing.

> JESSICA WERB