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MUSIC REVIEW

Los Angeles Piano Quartet balances virtuosity, urgency

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When chamber musicians flex their individual muscles, it sometimes leads to collective disaster. Not so with the Los Angeles Piano Quartet, whose concert of Mozart and Faure Sunday at Hulsey Recital Hall balanced virtuosity, urgency and an immaculate blend.

It was the perfect kickoff to Mozart 250th birthday celebrations here. And an ideal rendering of Mozart's Quartet in G minor for violin, viola, cello and piano, K. 478, provided you prefer Mozart pithy and vibrant, rather than fussy and dainty.

The ensemble focused on the descending chromatics and lingering suspensions in the opening Allegro, giving its classic proportions a sculpturesque feel. A high sustained note by violinist

Michi Wiancko seemed to materialize from nowhere in the Andante, only to alight gracefully with the rest of the group. The Rondo vacillated from playful to powerful, floating on cresting waves one moment, diving deep into brawny accents the next.

Faure's Quartet in C minor was even more urgently driven, first in the opening melody, played by the strings in octaves, then by pianist Xak Bjerken, who consistently played the role of equal partner, never dominating or upstaging. The Scherzo was lightly textured and peppered with dancing pizzicato strings. Each player got a chance to sing out in the Adagio, first cellist Peter Rejto, then echoed by violist Katherine Murdock and Wiancko.

The finale offered some of the

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LOS ANGELES PIANO QUARTET

Sunday
Hulsey Recital Hall, UAB
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most dynamic playing of the concert. This was an electrifying performance, thick and colorful, fiery and gutsy, its ebbs and swells set in sharp relief.

Wiancko and Bjerken opened with an equally robust performance of Mozart's Sonata in G major for violin and piano, K. 379, in which fierce abandon was tempered with pastoral restraint.

The quartet offered an encore, a brilliantly rhythmic and jovial movement from Joaquin Turina's Piano Quartet.

Mozart note: The Violin Sonata in G major, K. 379, likely was composed in one hour on a night in April 1781. Mozart played it from memory the next day.