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Ying Quartet marks two decades at the Kreeger

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Twenty years ago, the Ying Quartet kicked off the newly opened Kreeger Museum's chamber music concert series. They've appeared there many times since and, on Saturday, were on hand again to help celebrate the museum's 20th anniversary.

The Kreeger's "Great Hall" is an ideal chamber music venue. "Great" in its height, design and the Georges Braque paintings that surround the audience, it is also intimate in acoustics that envelop you in the subtleties of the music. And, over 26 years of playing together (three of the original four siblings are still with the group) the Yings have reigned in their more symphonic-like inclinations and have learned to savor these subtleties.

Those subtleties could be especially savored in a performance of the Beethoven Quartet Opus 74, "The Harp," where themes were tossed back and forth seamlessly in the inner voices, and fleet unison runs whizzed by with a weightless but nicely rounded shape; and in the three vivid Stravinsky "Pieces for String Quartet," in which color and attack needed, and got, just the right touch.

The first violinist Ayano Ninomiya, who's been with the quartet for four years now, probably should take some credit for these inner voices coming through so powerfully. Fully capable as she is of dominating the ensemble with rich opulence (as she did from time to time in the Tchaikovsky Quartet in d minor that ended the program) she held back in the Beethoven, contributing to the textures and leading only when the music demanded. She has a formidable bow arm and a whole repertoire of sounds that she uses with great imagination and discretion.

The Tchaikovsky was big and colorful; its splashes of Russian operatic-like drama and its moments of repose were equally compelling.