

# Graffe String Quartet

**“as thrilling music-making as I’ve heard this year ... The Graffe’s performance was stunning.”**

**“the creme de la creme ... a beautiful performance ... that famous central European sound of well-balanced strings ... perfect tonal wave of joy.”**

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## REVIEW

### Chamber Music Society continues to offer excellence

By RICK JUSTICE  
FOR THE DAILY MAIL

One of the driving factors that has contributed to the artistic maturity taking place in Charleston in the past five years or so has been the clear-headed selections and presentations by the Charleston Chamber Music Society.

These selections have been followed up by inviting the creme de la creme of these musical groups for a return visit.

Saturday evening’s presentation of the Graffe String Quartet with pianist Michiko Otaki was a case in point.

One of the Czech Republic’s finest young string quartets, Graffe gave a beautiful performance in the spacious sanctuary at Christ Church United Methodist.

After settling in with the first movement of Franz Joseph Haydn’s String Quartet in g minor No. 3 (Rider),

Graffe really began to sing with that famous central European sound of well-balanced strings as the quartet began the second movement, Allegro moderato.

One could do nothing but close his eyes and have a visceral moment of pleasure.

What could possibly be more rewarding to the spirit

than this perfect tonal wave of joy?

Why the next work, of course: Beethoven’s String Quartet in B-flat major.

Graffe explored the innermost meanings of this familiar work in a manner that was clear and incisive.

More and more musical worth was drawn from the souls of these instrumentalists, and frankly, left nothing to be desired.

Pianist Michiko Otaki joined Graffe after intermission for a stirring rendition of Antonin Dvorak’s Quintet for Piano and Strings in A major.

The solo piano entrance of the second movement, Dumka: Andante con moto, snapped me to attention as I realized that it was note for note, phrase for phrase, the opening of the great jazz ballad “Nature Boy,” recorded by Nat “King” Cole.

Small wonder that both works are so beautiful.

After the Dvorak, all musicians returned to the stage for an encore, the scherzo from Bohuslav Martinu’s Piano Quintet, a recording of which was available for sale in the lobby after the concert.

We’ve come to expect excellence from the Charleston Chamber Music Society, and it seems to be happy to deliver.

pianist

# Michiko Otaki

**“a very precise pianist with abundant technique and a colorful tonal palette.”**

**Next North  
American tour:  
Autumn, 2010**

The Charleston Gazette

★★ MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2008 **6B**

## Czechs and balances make impression

By David Williams  
For the Gazette

Who could argue?

The Charleston Chamber Music Society was quick to invite the Graffe String Quartet and the pianist Michiko Otaki for a return engagement.

**REVIEW**  
In March 2007, the musicians made a strong impression with Schumann’s Piano Quintet in E-flat, while the Graffe played Haydn’s Op. 33, No. 2 and Smetana’s Quartet No. 2 with panache. It was the Czech ensemble’s first American tour.

The musicians were every bit as good Saturday night in Dvorak’s Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 81. Otaki is a very precise

pianist, with abundant technique and a colorful tonal palette. Paired with the Graffe, whose rhythm is so precise one wonders if the players’ heartbeats are centrally controlled, the results were magical.

The first movement was grand and passionately lyrical, full of nuance and color. The “Dumka” had Lukas Cybulski’s creamy, dark viola solos as a foundation and a gorgeous ending. The scherzo, built around Michal Hreno’s vigorous cello melodies and Otaki’s flourishes, gave way to a beautifully placid trio.

The finale was as thrilling music-making as I’ve heard this year, especially when the hymn-like harmonies of the coda turned into a display of glitter-

ing virtuosity.

That said, it wasn’t always easy to hear the inner details of the music. You could blame the hall at Christ Church United Methodist. When the music was loud and everyone was playing, balances just got overwhelmed by reverberations. This could be a bit of subjectivity on my part — I like clarity of texture above all else — but I spent the piece straining to hear inner voices.

No problems were evident with clarity and balance in the other two works on the program, Haydn’s Quartet in G Minor, Op. 74, No. 3 (“Rider”) and Beethoven’s Quartet in B-Flat Op. 18, No. 6.

Haydn was the first great democratic composer and his quartets are his founding prin-

ciples. All four voices engage in an intricate conversation and, significantly, ideas that are secondary in nature have a way of turning into important ones.

The Graffe’s performance was stunning.

The Beethoven was, if anything, more impressive. The rhythm was pleasingly accurate but not rigid. This made the dizzying layers of cross-rhythms in the scherzo wondrous. The finale, “La Malinconia” (unfortunately misspelled in the program), shifted effortlessly between very slow and a rapid tempos, with dash. All of it was wrapped in attractive tone colors.

The large crowd’s enthusiasm drew an encore of the opening of the scherzo of Martinu’s Piano Quintet No. 2.