

A pleasant interlude visits from Marlboro

By GAYLE WILLIAMS
CORRESPONDENT

There is hardly anything more soothing or nurturing than a good Haydn string quartet — and when the Musicians from Marlboro launched into Haydn's String Quartet in D Major, Op. 20, No. 4 Hob. III:34, they knew what they were doing. They stayed on the more tender and delicate end of the expressive range, even when the music was lively. No ruffled feathers here. But, really, Josef Haydn was a happy man who knew his craft well and employed it toward positive ends. Whether melancholy or joyful, his music is simply reassuring us all is well, and that was exactly what these musicians expressed.

Every summer since 1951, master musicians and eager students have gathered in a rural Vermont town to study and play chamber music together at the legendary Marlboro Music Festival.

These days, four touring ensembles are formed from the program highlights of the previous summer. In this program, five stellar younger professionals (Susie Park and Harumi Rhodes, violin, Priscilla Lee, cello, Rudolf Vrbsky, oboe, and Ieva Jokubaviciute, piano) were accompanied by a member of the Juilliard String Quartet, violist Samuel Rhodes.

The Rhodeses are father and daughter, and they were joined by Park and Lee in the Haydn quartet. Park, Lee and the elder Rhodes next teamed up with oboist Vrbsky for a rather gnarly Oboe Quartet by the esteemed Elliott Carter. While fascinating, this quartet seems engaging only to those truly committed to unlocking its mysteries. Even when played flawlessly, it is difficult, but with pitch uncertainties and an oboist who may have been struggling with a humidity hampered reed, it is nearly impossible.

Audience response tripled at the conclusion of the final work on the program, Robert Schumann's infinitely enjoyable Piano Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 42. Jokubaviciute played with strength and sensitivity along with Harumi and Samuel Rhodes, and Lee as the string trio. They were rich and emotive. This ensemble had the presence and bite to chew on the passionate outbursts of Schumann, making us wish we could linger with them next summer in Vermont.