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Cecilia String Quartet first concert in fall classical series

Arts - The Cecilia String Quartet has established itself as one of the premier string quartets in the world and has achieved the kind of acclaim and critical praise that its members could only have dreamt of when they first got together less than a decade ago at the University of Toronto.

But that doesn't mean they're satisfied. "You never really think you've made it," says founding member and first violin Sarah Nematallah. "You can always play better."

Such dedication promises well for a great show when the Cecilia String Quartet comes to Brockville on Saturday, Sept. 28, where theirs will be the first concert in the fall classical series put on by the Brockville Concert Association.

In the years since their founding, members Caitlin Boyle, playing the viola; Rachel Desoer, cello; Min-Jeong Koh, violin; and Nematallah have only improved, and as their sound improved so too did the recognition they received within the world of classical music.

In 2008, the group won a string quartet festival in Osaka, Japan and in 2010 they did the same at a competition in Bordeaux, France. Later that year, the CSQ became only the second Canadian foursome to win the world-renowned Banff International String Quartet Competition.

"That was a very special experience for all of us," says Nematallah.

When not making room on their mantles for first-place medals, Nematallah and her musical colleagues are on stage, playing in front of appreciative audiences around the world. They have toured Canada and the United States extensively and have taken the stage in some of the best concert houses in Europe, including the Concertgebouw Kleine Zaal in Amsterdam, Beethoven-Haus in Bonn and Wigmore Hall in London.

In 2012, the Cecilia String Quartet released an eponymous debut studio album featuring the music of Dvorak, and earlier this year, they released their second fulllength recording, called *Amaroso*, featuring music about love, in particular love that burns brightly at first but then turns dark and dangerous.



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The Cecilia String Quartet will be playing the music of Haydn and Tchaikovsky.

"It's about passionate but devastating love," says Nematallah.

Inventive and intimate, chamber music finds its fullest expression in the string quartet, which Goethe described as like a conversation between four intelligent people-but in music. Part of what makes the conversation between the members of the CSQ so compelling and so listenable is the relationship they share when they put the instruments down.

"We actually get along really well," says Nematallah. "And that collegial friendship really strengthens our team."

Their warm but commanding musical style is helped along, too, by the instruments three of the members use, and will be bringing to Brockville. Koh plays a 1767 Joannes Baptista Guadagnini violin and Nematallah an 1851 Jean Baptiste Vuillaume, both of which have been loaned to the group by an anonymous benefactor. Desoer currently plays a cello built in 1929 by Carlo Giuseppe Oddone and provided to the group courtesy of the Canada Council for the Arts.

"We strive to have a really beautiful, blended sound, and playing instruments with such beautiful tones helps us do that," says Nematallah.

Mingling superior instruments with the virtuoso skill and passionate sensibility of Nematallah, Boyle, Koh and Desoer, the Cecilia String Quartet is equal to the task of not only playing but interpreting the vast repertoire of string quartet music.

"Some of the greatest pieces of music ever written were written for the string quartet," says Nematallah.

Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn: each has written renowned string quartets, but perhaps the most prominent string quartet composer is Haydn, who wrote 68 of them and is referred to by some as 'Papa Haydn'-the father of the string quartet.

"Haydn really set the stage for all quartet writers after him," says Nematallah. Haydn's work will feature prominently in the CSQ's Brockville show, where the group will perform his String Quartet Op. 20 No. 4 in D Major. They will also perform a piece by Tchaikovsky, who is better known for his operas and ballets, but whose aesthetic can be heard in his quartets just the same.

"You hear a lot of beautiful rhythms and melodies like you might hear in a ballet," says Nematallah.

The third piece on the set list for Brockville is by Katarina Curcin, a former university classmate of the CSQ members who composed a work entitled 'Walking Away From...!', a stylistically modern composition that tells of the writer's experience leaving her native Serbia.

"We're really excited to bring this to audiences," says Nematallah.

Anyone who wants to be in the audience when the Cecilia String Quartet comes to the Brockville Arts Center can buy tickets online at brockvilleartscentre.com or in person at the BAC box office.