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Young Concert Artists, Inc.

MODIGLIANI STRING QUARTET

The Birmingham News

Birmingham, Alabama • Monday, March 3, 2008

MUSIC REVIEW

Group leaves no note out of place

By MICHAEL HUEBNER
News staff writer

The Birmingham Chamber Music Society's 2007-08 season opened in October with one of the world's great established string quartets — the Takacs. It closed Sunday with what could rank among the finest of the next generation.

After only five years together, the young musicians of the Paris-based Amedeo Modigliani Quartet have forged a rare combination of depth, enthusi-

★★★★★

AMEDEO MODIGLIANI

Philippe Bernhard,
violinist

Loic Rio, violinist
Laurent Marfaing,
violinist

François Kieffer,
cellist

Sunday
Alys Stephens
Center

asm and near-faultless technique. In their program of Haydn, Debussy and Beethoven, these meticulous artisans left no pizzicato note out of place, no accent unstressed, no phrase unshaped.

Dressed uniformly in black suits, shirts and silver ties, these young men brought just as much equality to Haydn's Quartet in

G minor ("Rider"). Most striking was first violinist Philippe Bernhard's inclination to blend rather than dominate, allowing each of the others to come into sharp focus.

Debussy's shimmering, sometimes dizzying chromatics in the Quartet in G minor were articulated with exaggerated swells and an unusual rhythmic precision. The largely pizzicato second movement was unusually vibrant, yet without a misplaced pluck or snap. They were so evenly matched in the Andantino, solos melded seamlessly from instrument to instrument. They extended their dynamic range in the finale, exploring Debussy's expansive score with fearless abandon.

Bernhard's expressive, smoothly connected opening melody in Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 59, No. 3, set the pace for a kinetic reading that seemed to gain momentum as it went along. Jarring accents and snapping pizzicato in the second movement led to the richly-hued Menuetto. In the stormy finale, one couldn't help but be swept up in the group's intensity.

A heart-tugging Adagio from Haydn's "Sunrise" Quartet was played for an encore.