

# Artaria quartet, Savino play finely crafted concert

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DEERFIELD — The audience at the Brick Church in Old Deerfield Friday were treated to a special evening of classical-era music performed by the Artaria String Quartet with guitarist Richard Savino. This was the last Music in Deerfield concert for the season.

Though faced with financial difficulties last year, a shortening of their concert season and added listener contributions have put Music in Deerfield back on secure footing. Audiences have come to expect to hear some of the world's finest artists on this concert series, and this continues to be the case.

The Artaria Quartet members all play with gut strings and lightweight bows, in keeping with 18th century practice. As a result, their instruments sound a bit softer than do those played with modern bows and metal strings. Savino played a small ornate guitar, one close to 200-years-old, but used nylon strings (which stay better in tune than do gut).

Their ensemble playing is finely crafted and, to contemporary ears, understated. They succeed in bringing out many hidden details in the music with grace and well-honed sensitivity.

The quartet began with the E-flat Major String Quartet by Franz Josef Haydn, No. 2 from his Opus 33. His six Opus 33 quartets had a formative influence on many prominent composers of the time, Mozart in particular.

The Artaria delivered a fascinating interpretation, highlighting unexpected moments while holding back in other moments where one might have expected greater indulgence. This quest for musical "truths" caused the Artaria to take the up-tempo movements slower than I am used to hearing them, which only bothered me in the last movement ("The Joke"). I feel a faster tempo makes this piece funnier, though the Artaria brought off the "joke" part very well by actually acting as though the piece had fin-

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ished when there was still a one-bar phrase to go.

Next we heard Luigi Boccherini's Guitar Quintet in D minor. For this work, Elizabeth Blumenstock played first violin (Anthony Martin had in the Haydn). She moved things forward with a drive that was welcome after the more careful Haydn reading. Savino's guitar work was impressive: always easily heard through the ensemble in spite of his mellow timbre (a result of playing very much off the side of his nails), always thoughtful.

The Grand Quintet in A by Mauro Giuliani, as Savino suggested later, is "like a concerto without the first movement." The musicians made it into something both clever and elegant. At one point the string players bounced the backs of their bows on the strings (a device known as *col legno*), sounding like castanets.

Katherine Kyme took over the first violin chair for the final work, Mozart's Quartet in D, K. 575. This practice of rotating players among the horizontal strings (Elizabeth Le Guin maintains her peg-free hold on the cello throughout) seems quite successful. Not only does it help give each successive piece a new personality — by changing who plays the more prominent top line — it makes one hear the inner parts (viola and second violin) differently as well. I paid closer attention to the viola lines after appreciating how well the same player had executed a first violin part.

Martin told me afterward that rotating has the advantage also of keeping the players more engaged and excited about the music. This is a lovely and clever piece. The Artaria played tenderly without getting sentimental.

The audience much appreciated this visit by these San Francisco area musicians, and appreciated as well the organizers of Music in Deerfield for choosing to bring them to us.