

Toronto Star - July 5, 2006 - John Terauds - Toronto Summer Chamber Music Festival

Rich music from lull between the wars

Who says there can't be serious music in the city once the temperature goes past 25 degrees?

The first program of the three-concert second edition of the Toronto Summer Chamber Music Festival **assembled a clutch of first-rate performers** who sank their sharp chops into meaty music from the early decades of the 20th century.

It's the great tragedy of classical music that most listeners do not respond to the siren call and rhythmic beat of the last great fit of experimentation, which exploded in the first part of the 20th century between the War to End All Wars and the cataclysm of World War II.

The festival settles into the straightforward, melodic world of the Romantic era tonight and Friday. But last night at the Glenn Gould Studio, it was all-out assault on conventional musical sensibilities.

Who better to lead the charge than Belgium's Arriaga String Quartet, joined by Canadian pros Richard Raymond (piano), Moshe Hammer (violin) and James Campbell (clarinet).

The Arriagas, led on first violin by festival artistic director Michael Guttman, have a particularly muscular, up-front style of playing that was **ideally suited to Darius Milhaud's electrically charged String Quartet No. 1, from 1912**. And they dispatched Igor Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for String Quartet from 1914* - a mad, terse, assemblage of rhythmic and sonic effects - with equal assurance.

But in the subdued world of Gershwin's *Lullaby for String Quartet*, they couldn't achieve the detached, laid-back feel needed to carry off the American composer's gossamer sounds.

Hammer, Raymond and Campbell were impressive in Bartok's 1939 *Contrasts*, which ended the program in a crazed parody of a Hungarian folk dance. Joined by Arriaga cellist Luc Tooten in a Paul Hindemith *Quartet*, the players delivered a sensual, intense reading of this 1938 composition.

The excellent playing helped underscore how little progress composers have made in the last 70 years. It also reminded us that deeply committed performances bring even the most "difficult" works to vivid life.

Richard Raymond, is the centerpiece of tonight's program which brings back the Arriaga Quartet in a varied 19th-century program by Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Julius Reubke and Chopin. Raymond's assured, elegant playing will certainly have a chance to shine.

The final concert, Friday night, is dedicated to two works by Franz Schubert - *The Trout Quintet* and the *Octet in F Major*. It should not be hard to get the \$30 tickets at the Glenn Gould Studio door.