

Performance brings out the intensity of 'Quartet'

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REVIEW

Hearing Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time" can be both a captivating and an emotionally draining experience. In fact, it should be.

Those were just the effects of Sunday afternoon's performance of the piece by pianist Elena Abend, violinist Erin Aldridge, clarinetist Mark Gallagher and cellist German Marciano in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Piano Chamber Series.

The "Quartet" is widely regarded as one of the most important pieces of 20th-century chamber music.

Messiaen wrote this piece while interned in a prisoner-of-war camp during World War II. His choice of instrumentation was dictated by the fact that the camp contained a clarinetist, a violinist and a cellist. The piece reflects his religious devotion and his love of nature.

The four musicians featured in Sunday's performance played with unwavering intensity. In their hands, the eight movements of the "Quartet," each of which bears a distinctly pro-

grammatic title, such as "Liturgy of Crystal" or "Abyss of the Birds," were unique, powerful vignettes.

Gallagher's interpretation of the solo clarinet movement "Abyss of the Birds" was at once technically masterful and musically gripping. The clarinetist serves as both the voice of the birds and the yawning abyss of time. His whispered entrances and seemingly random bird songs juxtaposed with relentless, sans-vibrato cries made a dramatic impact.

Marciano's reading of the fifth movement, "Praise to the Eternity of Jesus," was a study in long, graceful phrases.

Each of the players had a firm grip on the shape of the piece as a whole, keeping individual phrases and movements in context of the greater work. A few technical wobbles from the violin and cello did not dampen the musical impact of the performance.

The concert was preceded by a brief, insightful lecture by composer and lecturer Josh Schmidt.