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The Quartet's many musical shades



The Hindu

The Kodaly Quartet went beyond merely employing an arsenal of sounds and techniques to gift a joyous evening of music. Photo: R. Ravindran

The Kodaly Quartet at its concert in the city blended the best of the old and the new

The concert by the Kodaly Quartet from Hungary was a lesson in science, where the end result of its experiments in sound was a state of grace for both the musicians and audience. Organised by the Chennai Western Music Association and the Balassi Institute, New Delhi, the concert held at the Sivagami Pethachi Auditorium featured the works of Joseph Haydn, Giuseppe Verdi and Ludwig van Beethoven.

Named for the iconic Hungarian modern composer and musicologist, Zoltan Kodaly, the string quartet founded in 1965 has as its first violinist Attila Falvay, an award-winning musician who trained at the prestigious Ferenc Liszt Academy, and who has led the quartet since 1990. The second violinist Erika Toth, also from the Liszt Academy, has trained at centres in North America and played with some quartets before joining this one nine years ago. Janos Fejervari, the violist, has been head of the viola section of the Budapest Opera, founding member of the Budapest String Chamber Orchestra, and professor at the famed Bela Bartok Conservatory, Budapest. Cellist Gyorgy Eder is also from the Liszt Academy and after having honed his skill in the music centres of the U.S. and Canada was principal cellist of the Budapest Symphony Orchestra and founder-member of the Eder String Quartet.

There were plenty of emotions to catalyse as the quartet performed for the first time in Chennai, opening with Haydn's *String Quartet Op. 76. No. 5* dedicated to the Hungarian count Joseph Georg van Erdody. Among Haydn's most ambitious works for chamber music, the piece has a seamless, sweet-toned agility that foils well the exchange of many motifs among the instrumentalists. Haydn, the inventor of the string quartet, wrote the piece in the late 1700s and wove in a lively first movement, a second movement in the unusual F sharp major key, a minuet, and the finale. The performance had the uplifting energy of a luxury car cruising with Falvay's

first violin at the wheel. The individual volleys in crescendo and diminuendo showcased musicianship without lending sensory overload to the character of the piece. Toth and Fejervari provided solidity in the minuet and Eder's staccato cello made a striking impact in the finale.

The Verdi had a more reckless edge with the quartet balancing the gravitas of its roughness with their smooth play. Their sharp directed vigour unearthed every hidden texture in the piece. The composer's only surviving quartet, the piece has echoes of his various operas spot lit by the stormy passages in the third movement and the pensive glow of the fourth which the quartet played stridently. The second movement with some pizzicato (plucking) by the cellist lent a dark-hued, soft-edged feel to the piece.

But it was the first movement with Eder's resonant acoustics on his cello that amplified Verdi's genius.

The final piece, Beethoven's *String Quartet Op.18. No. 1*, was dense yet light. The first of the composer's many quartets, it is a piece with plush chords. All four musicians played passionately unspooling richness even in the muted yet heavy third movement.

But it was in the second movement inspired by Romeo and Juliet that the musicians served complex music. Full of slides and subverted sounds, Beethoven's colourful genius was played out in this one. The quartet rounded off the evening with a remarkable ability to blend the best of the old and the new. For the encore they played George Gershwin's 'He Loves and She Loves', made immortal by Hollywood legend Fred Astaire. The Kodaly Quartet went beyond merely employing an arsenal of sounds and techniques to gift a joyous evening of music — they punctuated it with elements of beauty.