

The Tokai Quartet and dancers: an artful blend of disciplines

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Tokai Quartet

- Matjash Mrozewski and dancers
- At the Four Seasons Centre in Toronto on Tuesday

The busiest performance place at the Four Seasons Centre is not the main opera hall, but the foyer space known as the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre. This high-vaulted area on the building's second level is the scene of about 80 lunch-hour recitals a year, of vocal and instrumental chamber music, jazz and world music, and dance.

On Tuesday, the Toronto-based Tokai Quartet played Osvaldo Golijov's *Tenebrae* for string quartet, soprano and clarinet, with site-specific choreography for four dancers by Matjash Mrozewski. The piece, which was new in 2002, combines ruggedly modern and timeless Hebraic sounds with baroque themes and cadences gleaned from music by François Couperin, as well as barely melodized vocalizations of letters from the Hebrew alphabet and the one word, "Jerusalem."

Mrozewski's movements (performed by Kate Franklin, Tyler Gledhill, Anisa Tejpar and Mrozewski himself) mirrored the mixture of idioms very well, flowing from balletic turns into sweeping floor-bound motions that often ended with a crouched sculptural pose of one or several bodies. He made good use of the long narrow space as a means of projecting the dance toward the bleacher seats, and integrated soprano Jacqueline Woodley right into the action. She performed as a fifth dancer, often making her widely spaced musical entries from the peak of one of Mrozewski's kinetic phrases, sometimes literally from atop an artful heap of bodies.

Clarinetist Kornel Wolak brought a dark, woody supporting tone to the serene baroque tunelets that moved through the violin part, and the more lachrymose melodies that troubled viola and cello. The piece continually alternated between light and dark, often expressing both at once, though the final setting of "Jerusalem" sounded as sure and optimistic as Handel's setting of *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth*. Mrozewski capped the effect by positioning the clear-voiced Woodley at the peak of a human pedestal that made her look like the figure in a piece of triumphant religious statuary.

The Tokai opened the concert with a robust performance of Beethoven's challenging String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor – a nifty choice for a visually busy venue overlooking eight lanes of traffic. The Tokai (violinists Amanda Goodburn and Csaba Koczó, violist Yosef Tamir-Smirnoff and cellist Emmanuelle Beaulieu Bergeron) is a fairly hot-blooded ensemble, and this quality served them well in the vigorous allegro sections of the piece, and in some of its cantabile episodes as well. I wasn't so keen on the seamless style the quartet adopted for the opening section, in which most phrase distinctions melted into a rather soporific flow of sound.

The Tokai is a very part-time thing for its members, who all have standing commitments with bigger ensembles, including the Toronto Symphony and Canadian Opera Company orchestras. That made it all the more striking that they could pull off a work like this as well as they did, though I look forward to the day when they can devote more time to making a good group even better.