

Reviews

Your monthly critical round-up of performances, recordings and publications

CONCERTS

TELEGRAPH QUARTET

WEILL RECITAL HALL 6 FEBRUARY 2018

A chain of mentors produced a fascinating evening with the San Francisco-based Telegraph Quartet, winners of the 2016 Naumburg Award for chamber music. Robert Sirota's String Quartet no.3 'Wave upon Wave' (2017), which received its world premiere at this concert, is a response to 'the uncertainty of this moment in our history, rife with threats of tyranny, environmental catastrophe and the human potential

TRISTAN COOK

for evil'. Using a mostly tonal language, coupled with fast trills and glissandos giving a sense of unease, Sirota has created a virtuoso vehicle for the Telegraph players, who combined impressive technique with mournful ambiguity.

Leon Kirchner, one of Sirota's teachers, wrote his String Quartet no.1 in 1949, and it's a mystery why this detailed, powerful score hasn't attracted more players' attention. Perhaps the fourth-movement Adagio is the most striking, in which the tiniest gestures register as strong opinions. In the memorable closing chord the first violin was the high outlier, as the other three instruments plunged into a subterranean realm.

To complete the evening came another inaugural quartet, this time by Schoenberg, who was Kirchner's teacher. In a single movement, the Quartet no.1 in D minor op.7 has dazzling mood shifts, ranging from the torrid opening flow to the reedy chorale (muted and sul ponticello) that appears near the end. With precise tuning, textural variety and impassioned communication, the Telegraph players burned this masterpiece into one's memory.

BRUCE HODGES