Spotlight offering rich, sumptuous Review

Balkan String Quartet has classical as well as popular appeal
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The Atlanta-based Balkan String Quartet presented the final program for the Piccolo Spotlight Concert Series last night. With the rich and sumptuous folk tunes from the Balkans, the quartet filled the New Tabernacle Fourth Baptist Church and enriched us with their superb musicianship.

The most classic and mature selection on the program was the four-movement work of Aleksander Glazunov, his "Quartet Slav." This was an excellent selection for the quartet and set the stage for the distinctive and eclectic programming of the evening.

The Balkan String Quartet formed from a group of freelance string players from the Gwinnett Ballet Orchestra in Atlanta to revive the Balkan sound that the early members claimed as their own. From this inspiration, the quartet has encouraged talented contemporary composers to write with the indigenous Balkan language and it is from that repertoire that they draw their selections.

The music is haunting, at times rhythmic and gypsy-like and often characterized by unusual meters, modal tonality and vibrant percussive rhythm from using their instruments in innovative ways. At one point I was almost certain I could hear castanets when it was simply the cellist tapping his sound board.

It is always exciting when performers can inspire composers to write for performance. Brian Mitchell's Serbian folk tune-inspired "Wishing, Wanting, Waiting" premiered on the program Friday night. Mitchell was in the audience and received enthusiastic applause as he was recognized.

The Balkan String Quartet is an interesting group and has popular as well as classical appeal. Each of the group talked to the audience about the selections but was hard to hear because of the lack of amplification in the room. They don't appear to have a Web site or any recordings and it would be nice to have both. This is a group to follow. We want to hear more.