

A fine quartet

Performance warm and vibrant

By Lionel Wise

The opening concert in this season's chamber series at Carleton University was presented Saturday night by the Vaghy String Quartet. This quartet, based at Queen's University in Kingston, is now in its 10th year; the group is well-known now throughout North America and to a lesser extent abroad. The quartet's playing is highlighted by excellent rapport as an ensemble, and by the warmth and vibrancy of its interpretations.

The program in the Alumni Theatre presented a microcosm of the development of the string quartet, with a late work by Haydn, truly the father of the string quartet; Ravel's only quartet, in which the interplay of harmony and timbre displace thematic development although classical form is followed strictly; and a delightful contemporary work by Koprowski, which on a first hearing must be

described as abstract and free form, and as program music which draws the listener into a web of surrealism.

The quartet in G major is almost the last of more than 80 Haydn wrote. In this form Haydn reached the peak of his art, and this work is akin to Beethoven in its imagination and depth. The Vaghy Quartet exploited these facets skillfully. The opening Allegro positively bounced along, with a jauntiness enhanced by fine phrasing. The second and third movements are dominated by the first violin, and the demands on the leader, especially in the energetic high passages, led to occasional intonation problems. However the closing Presto, played at breath-taking speed, was thoroughly polished.

The first quartet of Peter Paul Koprowski was written in Poland in 1967, just before the composer came to Canada; he now teaches at the University of Western Ontario. There are three parts—one hesitates to say movements. The first begins with frantic agitation and then moves from apparent chaos into a calm of plaintive voices, with an ethereal pizzicato section. Use of ponticello, where the bow near the bridge of the instrument produces an almost mystical sound, is very effective.

The second part is conversational, especially at the beginning. There the violins have a dialogue over the drone of the viola and cello. The third seems to abandon introspection for the familiar

and is reminiscent of the impressionism associated with the music of Debussy and Ravel. The work was well-played and well-received; happily the composer was present to receive his accolade.

The Ravel quartet that closed the recital is a complex work from the composer's early period. The piece is a staple in the Vaghy Quartet's repertoire, and deservedly so; the group has a fine feeling for the nuances of the music and the ensemble control essential to a good reading.

The concert was a fine performance of fine music by a fine quartet. However, if the works were played in chronological order the evident progression in form would be underlined. Program notes should be provided, particularly in fairness to the contemporary composer, Koprowski. The chronic cold in the auditorium is cause for complaint. It certainly caused pitch problems.