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The Minneapolis Guitar Quartet performs modern selections with passion, dexterity

By Cat Mantione-Holmes

The Minneapolis Guitar Quartet gave a wonderful demonstration of how compelling modern music can be during their performance Saturday night at Hodgson Hall in the University of Georgia's Performing Arts Center.

Although MGQ played transcribed works from other periods and for other instruments, the show's emphasis was on modern works, most written for the Minneapolis Guitar Quartet.

These included a work called "Fa" by Bun-Ching Lam. Drawing on the many different meanings of the Chinese word Fa – transformation, dissolving, chemistry, attaining enlightenment – the work was a fascinating mix of dissonance and harmony, single notes and layering of sound.

The premiere of "Fantasy Quartet" by Athens composer Lewis Nielson, was the highlight of the show. David Crittenden, a member of MGQ and a UGA graduate, introduced the work by saying that he had performed several of Nielson's solo works before and had always been struck by their passion and intensity. This was certainly no understatement, in this, Nielson's first guitar quartet.

The "Fantasy Quartet" took the audience through a sonic journey that began with ponderous monotony, then blasted off into the musical stratosphere. The flight included fierce exclamations of discord and chaos and moments of feather-light, harplike unison. It was a moving piece, and MGQ played it with passion and breath-taking dexterity.

As with most of the modern work on the program, this was not easy listening. Although new and unfamiliar, the music amply rewarded those who paid the attention that the works demanded.