

# The Washington Post

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## MUSIC REVIEW

# Cambini-Paris Quartet's warm bow to the past

BY CHARLES T. DOWNEY

An offshoot of the historically informed performance (HIP) movement was the formation of string quartets that play on period instruments. Two such groups are the Quatuor Mosaïques and Washington's Smithsonian Quartet. The trend, if it can be so called, continued with the Cambini-Paris Quartet in 2007, which had its Washington debut Sunday afternoon at the Phillips Collection.

The musicians, specialists from French early-music groups, play on historical instruments with gut strings. In the program's first half of 18th-century music, the quartet also used bows like

those used when the music was created — lighter in tension and not as wide in contact with the string. The effect was as intimate as the museum's small music room — a warm sound left mostly, but not entirely, without vibrato, requiring one to lean in and listen closely. Mozart's String Quartet No. 19 in C, K. 465 ("Dissonance") and Hyacinthe Jadin's String Quartet Op. 1/2 were like twins separated at birth, as the latter was based closely on the former. The group's historical practices, far from being limiting, opened up sound worlds, revealing inner lines and extending the concept of soft dynamics.

When most of the musicians switched to later types of bows for Félicien David's

first string quartet, from 1868, the difference in sound was striking. In all three pieces, the group's intonation was nearly flawless (except perhaps for some imprecision in the cello), and first violinist Julien Chauvin carried the piece with effortless technique and beauty of tone. It is not, as critics of HIP ideas often protest, that all performances by these historical string quartets must follow these tenets, but anyone who wants to know these works profoundly and ignores performances such as these is missing out on valuable information.

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## Musicians strive for authenticity by bowing to the past



The Cambini-Paris Quartet plays on period instruments with gut strings. (Franck Juery)

By Charles T. Downey May 4

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