

## REVIEW:...

### Sunday

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When a world premiere turns out to be a concert's easiest piece to negotiate, you know the players have taken on some challenges. Saturday evening's performance at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival in the Shalin Liu Performance Center did include a world premiere — "Dogtown Common," by Charles Shadle — as well as Beethoven's C minor string trio, and Fauré's dynamic first piano quartet. Pianist and outgoing RCMF artistic director David Deveau engaged long-time colleagues Bayla Keyes (violin), Michael Reynolds (cello) and Steven Ansell (viola) to tackle the evening's repertory.

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

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Shadle's quartet drew its strengths and its weaknesses from the same place: the thorough engagement of all four players for the entire duration of the one-movement work. That energy brought listeners into the work from the very beginning, creating a taut texture, always tuneful and tonal, which never subsided.

It also led to a certain sameness in the sound, with dynamics rarely straying into the very soft or the very forceful.

The appeal of “Dogtown Common” belied the fact that audiences were hearing it for the first time. Its impact is immediate, from the simple, softly rising opening melody. A second theme appears as a more open, spare idea, and together their interaction forms the basis of the work.

A modest fugue treatment interjects itself mid-way through the work, and clever modulations, staying mostly in minor keys, change the mood. The outro — with Ansell articulating delicate harmonics in the final measure — comes abruptly, but quietly, an unusual gesture.

Variations in texture and dynamics would broaden the continuing appeal of “Dogtown Common,” but as a final season commemoration (the work is dedicated to Deveau), the quartet impeccably suited the occasion.

Beethoven’s three string trios don’t get nearly enough attention. Keyes, Ansell and Reynolds opened the concert with the last, a formidable, wide-ranging piece. It’s a demanding work, and did not quite receive the treatment it deserved in this performance.

The articulation of some phrases, especially in the first movement, came across as ragged, the violin a step ahead here, the other instruments a step behind there. With ideas fast and frequently presented, this mattered. The scherzo — shifting minor to major and back again — found its bearings, and the finale brought the piece safely home.

Deveau joined the string players after intermission for Fauré’s generous quartet, alternately expansive and fragile. This playing also had its engrossing moments and its challenging ones, with Deveau’s driving grasp of the Romantic possibilities leading the ensemble successfully in the end.

The Rockport Chamber Music Festival, celebrating David Deveau’s 22nd and final season as artistic director, continues through July 9. For tickets and information visit [www.rockportmusic.org](http://www.rockportmusic.org) or call 978-546-7391.

*Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR’s ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to [keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com](mailto:keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com)*

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