



Title: Ancora String Quartet, First Unitarian Join Hands

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The church needed a resident music group and the recently founded string quartet needed a home venue.

So a happy and productive marriage has taken place between Madison's Ancora String Quartet and the First Unitarian Society, which has cut back its classical programming in recent years. It seems an ideal collaboration for both groups. Once again the Unitarians -- once known as the "First Church of Music" -- will have more serious classical fare, and the quartet will get a much deserved higher profile and weekend nights for performances.

The inaugural public event in the new partnership takes place Saturday at 7:30 p.m. in the landmark Frank Lloyd Wright-designed First Unitarian Society Meeting House, 900 University Bay Drive. The program includes Haydn's String Quartet in G Major, Op. 77, No. 1, and Brahms' String Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 51. Also included will be the second movement of Maurice Ravel's only string quartet, a work that will be performed in its entirety later in the season.

"I have worked with them before and I know they play well," says Dan Broner, the society's music director. "They were looking for a place where they could put down roots for a series, and I was looking for new and fresh ways to promote classical music the way we did in the past. So I think it's a match made in heaven.

"Last year, I heard them do quartets by Shostakovich and Schubert and I was very impressed with their musicianship," he adds. "They're also going to work with our religious programs and do a demonstration for the kids. It's like a trial. We'll do it for a year and take stock, and then see where we go from there."

Last weekend, the quartet was formally introduced to the congregation as featured soloists during the Sunday worship services.

The Ancora Quartet will perform two other times at the society this season: on Saturday, Feb. 3, at 7:30 p.m. when the program will include Mozart's Quartet in D minor, K. 421, and Ravel's String Quartet; then on Saturday, June 2, at 7:30 p.m. when the program will include Beethoven's Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3, and a work yet to be announced.