

## The Strad

August 2017

ATTACCA QUARTET, GREGG KALLOR (PIANO)  
LORETO THEATER AT THE SHEEN CENTER  
5 JUNE 2017

Perhaps best known for 'The 68' project (their traversal of all Haydn's quartets), the young musicians of the Attacca Quartet showed a different side of their omnivorous interests in this ingratiating evening of works by composer-pianist Gregg Kallor.

The main event was the world premiere of *Some Not Too Distant Tomorrow*, a piano quintet conceived as a tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. With the composer at the piano, the quartet dug into the first movement, 'The Fierce Urgency of Now', its angularity and syncopations reflecting the strength in King's 'I Have a Dream' speech. Later came blues-infused melodies floating over alluring pizzicato ostinatos alternating with bristling, rapid energy. The fifth movement, which gives the work its title, comes from King's 1963 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail', and in its granitic, complex chords, left a mood of optimism in its wake.

The quartet brought both zeal and accuracy, and playing so idiomatic that one might think of booking it for a jazz club. It didn't hurt, either, to observe the musicians constantly exchanging smiles on the intimate Loreto Theater stage, perhaps reflecting the message of love and hope. The quartet's precision also paid off in Mendelssohn's short String Quartet no. 2, which began with impeccably tuned chords and only grew more beautiful. Phrasing and tone combined in a handsomely played idyll.

The concert began with Kallor in his pensive *Notes from Underground* for solo piano. And to end it all was an unusual encore: his adroit arrangement of 'Layla', Eric Clapton and Jim Gordon's 1970s pop hit, which translated miraculously well into a piano quintet.

BRUCE HODGES