

# Ridge Quartet Performs With Passion

*By Marilyn Tucker  
Chronicle Staff Critic*

Wednesday's program in the Chamber Music West series at Hellman Hall sprang urgently to life in its second half with a full-blooded version of the Franck Piano Quartet.

The Ridge String Quartet had all throttles open, as did pianist Mack McCray, who filled out the ensemble.

Once thought to be erotic, even by the likes of Saint-Saens, the Franck remains impressive for the full range of its emotional content. The Ridge, often playing in vibrantly matched octaves, took its dramatic measure, with McCray providing marked assistance.

The cyclic nature of the work, with a theme that recurs in each of its three movements, was a major emphasis in this performance.

The Ridge Quartet — begun 11 years ago when its violinists Krista Bennion Feeney and Robert Rinehart were students at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and now joined by violist Maria Lambros and cellist Peter Wyrick — has assumed a powerful personality that is thoroughly American, possessed with an aggressiveness that is quite pleasing.

Before intermission, baritone Allen Shearer and pianist Earle Shenk presented Robert Greenberg's song cycle "The Passing Years," which they introduced last fall in a concert of Composers, Inc. Based on translations of Yiddish texts, the songs form a unified cycle in their celebration of the immigrant spirit and dreams that gave America a strong cultural identity.

Although the settings make no gesture toward easy listening, they are hewn with a strong and individual spirit. These are songs of proud men, of city buildings whose deterioration is seen as a metaphor for aging, of lives recalled with unflinching whimsy. There is a bantering ballad about a Jewish Old King Cole called "Rabbi Elimelleh." Finally there is a wedding of grim gothic terror, not a happy ending, to be sure.

The fine clarinetist Mark Brandenburg and pianist Timothy Bach began the program with Schumann's *Fantasiestuecke*, Op. 73. Brandenburg's approach to these three pieces was like that of a lieder singer, producing shades of nuance that resulted in beautifully shaped lines and phrases. Although the dynamics of each short piece varied considerably, all shared a certain restlessness that added to the poetic expressiveness.

There are three more outings for Chamber Music West, tomorrow afternoon at Villa Montalvo, Saratoga, and Monday and Wednesday at Hellman Hall.