By Marcio Bezerra

Sunday’s Chamber Music Series continued at The Society of the Four Arts with a concert by the Verona Quartet. Formed by graduate students at the Juilliard School, the group presented a demanding program that made no concessions to its players or the audience. In some ways, the highlight of the afternoon was the five minutes the group took to tackle the legendary Six Bagatelles for String Quartet, Op. 9 by Anton Webern.

One of the most revolutionary composers of the 20th century, Webern’s dodecaphonic writing sought to distill romantic expressiveness in a microscopic style that still baffles audiences today. Sometimes described as the forefather of the abstract and cerebral total Serialism of the 1950s, contemporary witnesses contradict that account, instead presenting a composer who saw his music as a continuation of the romantic legacy of Johannes Brahms.

And that was the style chosen by the Verona Quartet. Although the group observed the extreme dynamic shifts and sound effects to the smallest details, they did so in a highly expressive manner in a sharp contrast with the arid approach of other groups. The result was, arguably, the most intense and eerie five minutes of music one will hear this concert season.

Borrowing from Sibelius’ Second Symphony’s pulsing chords, the piece was played to a nice effect by the young players, who should be commended for bringing a world premiere to Palm Beach.

They also played more traditional works on Sunday. In fact, they opened the program with the String Quartet in F Major by Maurice Ravel. While their playing was technically solid, they missed many opportunities to bring forth the colorful effects Ravel’s music allows.

The second part of the program featured another classic, String Quartet no. 8 in E minor, Op. 59 no. 2 by Ludwig van Beethoven. The second of the “Razumovsky Quartets,” the work is revolutionary in many fronts, not only its extensive length. Here we witness a confident young Beethoven making chamber music to be heard attentively by an informed audience — a far cry from the background function most of this kind of music had for his antecessors.

The Verona Quartet gave another solid reading, closing an impressively ambitious program with aplomb.