

The Australian String Quartet at the Perth Concert Hall, Scotland - September 2010

Australian String Quartet

Perth Concert Hall

IT is not often that a concert hall is presented with a gift, but that is exactly what happened when, to mark the fifth anniversary of Perth Concert Hall and in celebration of Perth 800, the general manager Andrew Bolt and the Trustees of the 'other' Perth Concert Hall in Western Australia, had the idea of marking celebrations with the premier of a new work played by the Australian String Quartet.

This quartet of Sophie Rowell and Anne Horton, violins, Sally Boud, viola, and Rachel Johnston, cello, have established an excellent reputation both in their native land and internationally and it is easy to see why with this performance that incorporated playing of high intensity, passion, pathos, drama and technical mastery.

The opening piece, After Si-

lence... was especially composed for the evening by Australian composer Iain Grandage. As he explained in his programme notes, 'it is an overture from the bush of Western Australia, with the intention of partially evoking the outdoors indoors. It was written as a gift from the people of Perth, Western Australia, to the people of Perth, Scotland, in celebration of all that we share.

'After Silence... takes its inspiration from the meeting traditions of local indigenous custodians of the Perth region – the Noongah people. They sit and talk for days, often simultaneously, sharing the news of people passed away. This 'clearing the air' for the ceremonies to come gradually dissipates until the members fall to silence.'

The quartet emulated this meeting with a bustling opening, full of activity before releasing the tension to a more lyrical and calming premise. Played with great animation by the quartet, the hectic mood of the opening calmed to a more lyrical section

where the quartet demonstrated their rich full tonal quality. The birdsong-like central section was particularly engaging with the first violin playing with delightful spontaneity over long chords, before a final chorale brought the work to a delightfully peaceful conclusion.

This one movement work was beautifully played and combined excellent ensemble playing that brought out all the subtle nuances whilst the many technical demands were played with consummate ease. What a wonderful gift!

The two other works in the programme: Mendelssohn's String Quartet Op.12 and Schubert's Death and the Maiden Quartet, were more familiar fare and both were played with great style and maturity that held the audience enthralled.

The Mendelssohn is perhaps less well-known but was here given a performance that fully demonstrated the quartet's technical mastery, whilst showing the deep mellow quality of their

tone. This was evident from the first notes of the first movement, but it was the Canzonetta, that had a lovely lightness of touch and the central section in particular, reminiscent of the Scherzo of the Octet, that was played with real élan. The Finale, with its demanding technical challenges, had real character of expression and concluded a faultless performance.

Similarly, the Schubert Quartet was given a first-rate interpretation, with the Andante, five variations of the song Death and the Maiden, beautifully performed. Full of pathos it was played with great finesse, with the first violin and cello making strong contributions in their variations.

The lively finale from Haydn 'Fifths' Quartet, made a suitable encore to mark a performance that was outstanding in both quality and interpretation and made the visit from the Australian Quartet a truly memorable one.

Peter Rutterford

Perthshire Advertiser 28th September 2010