



AUSTRALIAN  
STRING  
QUARTET

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## Australian String Quartet hits its straps with new line-up

Steve Moffatt, NewsLocal  
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THE Adelaide-based Australian String Quartet has been through several changes of personnel over the 10 years I have been following them and has always put on a terrific show.

But the new violin team of Dale Barltrop and Francesca Hiew bring a special dimension now they have teamed up with seasoned campaigners violist Stephen King and cellist Sharon Draper.

Barltrop is a natural leader, having been concertmaster of both the Melbourne and Toronto Symphony Orchestras and having led the Australian World Orchestra under Sir Simon Rattle last year.

The great quality this new team has is cohesiveness — good balance, tight ensemble playing and, of course, the glorious sound of four instruments built by 18th century luthier Giovanni Battista Guadagnini.

For their second national tour of the year they opened with a work that puts the cohesion of any string quartet to the test — Anton Webern's *Fünf Sätze für Streichquartett Op 5*. These five pieces last around 10 minutes, the shortest of them being a mere 13 bars, and yet they say so much musically, exploring the 12-tone serialism of Schoenberg while gazing backwards at the late German Romantics Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss.

Mostly quiet, they require extraordinary control and precision. King likened them to a play in which four actors play the one part.

## **APLOMB**

Another metaphor for a string quartet is four equals having a conversation, and for that we can thank Joseph Haydn who liberated the cello from its ground bass Baroque role while also giving the viola and second violin plenty to say.

His 25th quartet, the Op 20 No. 2, performed with elegance and aplomb by the ASQ, broke new ground by opening with the cello rather than the first violin. The instrument also drives the beautiful capriccio adagio before the violin takes over solo duties again.

I had finally found my voice as a true composer

Melbourne pianist-composer Joe Chindamo is best known for his work in the jazz field but since working with his musical and life partner violinist Zoe Black he has turned more and more to classical composition, releasing a stunning album recently on which he added a violin part to Bach's Goldberg Variations.

Three years ago he was commissioned to write *Tempesta*, a four movement string quartet and he says that he felt that "I had finally found my voice as a true composer".

The names of the movements give the work some context — *Tempesta*, *Lament/Seduction*, *Frenzy* and *Flight*. It is a "musical autobiography of sorts", Chindamo says, which looks both at what has been and what is to come.

There are hints of his heroes Maurice Ravel and Bela Bartok throughout this entertaining and accessible work and inevitably his jazz background is an integral part, but his is an individual and distinctive voice, technically assured and multifaceted.

Felix Mendelssohn's sixth quartet was the last major work he completed before he died and was written after he heard the shocking news that his beloved sister Fanny had died.

The composer's grief and devastation can be heard throughout its four movements — in the urgency of the first allegro, the driving scherzo briefly relieved by a lyrical episode, and the heartbreaking pathos of the slow movement.

Barltrop and his colleagues brought power and passion to this program, seated for the two opening works and standing for the tempestuous second half.

They return to the City Recital Hall Angel Place on Thursday, October 20, for a program of works by Mozart, Ligeti and Ravel.

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