

Review – Transcend  
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## Transcend: Australian String Quartet

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Stephen King, Sharon Draper, Sophie Rowell and Francesca Hiew. Photo: Shane Reid

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The program opened with the String Quartet No 3 in E flat major by Spanish composer Juan Crisostomo de Arriaga.

Written in 1824, when Arriaga was just 16 years old, this is a beautiful piece full of passion and marked by changes in tension and texture. The discipline and precision of the players was evident from the first note.

Almost two centuries later, Australian composer Brett Dean premiered his String Quartet No 2, known as *And Once I Played Ophelia*. This is a series of five short movements, played as one piece without breaks.

The ASQ was joined on stage by guest soprano Allison Bell, who was electrifying as Ophelia. Bell's magnificent high range, coupled with a tremendous vocal agility, made this a dramatic performance.

After the interval, it was back to more traditional chamber music fare with Franz Schubert's String Quartet No 14 in D minor. *Death and the Maiden*, as it is more popularly known, is instantly recognisable from its gestural opening bars through all four movements to its final flourish.

This has been a year of change and reformation for the ASQ. Cellist Sharon Draper and violist Stephen King were joined for this concert by ASQ founder Sophie Rowell, back as guest first violin, and Francesca Hiew as second violin. Hiew will stay with the ASQ as second violin for the 2016 season and Dale Bartrop will complete the line-up of "the new Australian String Quartet" as first violin.

*Transcend* was a magnificent ending to the ASQ's 2015 season; I await the new incarnation of ASQ in 2016.

*The Australian String Quartet gave a one-only performance of Transcend in Adelaide last night. The first concert of its 2016 season will be Alleged Dances, at Adelaide Town Hall on February 29.*