

What : Metamorphoses, Mon 17 October 2016, City Recital Hall, NSW
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Australian String Quartet bring clarity and cohesion to end a triumphant season



Australian String Quartet (from left) Sharon Draper, Dale Barltrop, Francesca Hiew and Stephen King ended their 2016 season on a triumphant note. Picture: Jane Dempster/The Australian.

THE new-look Australian String Quartet has completed its first season triumphantly after a troubled and disruptive period in the Adelaide-based group's 30-year history.

And the final concert for 2016 demonstrated the two overriding qualities of this foursome: clarity and cohesion.

Their reading of Mozart's K590 quartet from the Prussian set — the last he wrote — floated at times in the first movement, so buoyant were Dale Barltrop's lead violin lines, underpinned by Sharon Draper's smooth and effortless cello and Stephen King's sonorous viola.

Francesca Hiew is the perfect foil for Barltrop, their two violins combining effortlessly, alive to each other's every nuance.

Mozart's noble and rich slow movement showed off this group's tonal beauty, enhanced by the family of 250-year-old Guadagnini instruments loaned to the ASQ.

The menuetto had just the right amount of skipping question and answer interplay while the finale, with its “Balkan” bowing over droning lower strings, brought a smile with its playfulness.

VEHEMENT

On the other hand Gyorgy Ligeti’s String Quartet No. 1 — its nickname Metamorphoses gave the concert its title — showcased the ASQ’s equally impressive muscular side. Its 17 densely-linked micro-movements have his hero Bela Bartok very much in the foreground.

The ensemble’s attention to the swiftly changing moods, tempos and dynamics were a highlight. Their diligent preparation paid off handsomely from the vehement quick passages to the slides and insect sounds in nocturnes, reminiscent of Bartok’s famous “night music” movements.

The cool airconditioned interior of the Recital Hall received a welcome warm front with the final work on the program, Ravel’s colourful and multi-layered quartet which pays homage to the disappearing melodic world of his teacher Gabriel Faure while looking forward to a newer palette of tonal colours.

Barltrop and his colleagues managed to bring out the finer points of Ravel’s ingenious work — its orchestral complexities and vibrant rhythms and textures — in an exemplary performance that will stay in this listener’s memory for a long time to come.

DETAILS

- **CONCERT:** Australian String Quartet
- **WHERE:** City Recital Hall Angel Place
- **WHEN:** Monday, October 17