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## UKARIA, Australian String Quartet

Rodney Smith, The Advertiser December 13, 2016 1:38pm

THE ASQ's new line-up is certainly winning plenty of supporters, as the additional Monday performance of their UKARIA (ex Ngeringa) program attests.

With popular guitarist Slava Grigoryan on board, there was plenty to engage and entertain, with strictly classical works by Horsley and Ligeti and crossover pieces by Muthspiel and Grandage. It's almost superfluous to add that the last two included guitar.

Iain Grandage's *Black Dogs* (2008) ended the program in a most compelling fashion. The ASQ has almost completely settled now, with playing that is spontaneous and powerful. These traits suited Grandage's assertive score, which propels itself forward with pulsating rhythms and an unrelenting sense of foreboding. This was strong stuff.

Wolfgang Muthspiel's *Flexible Sky* (1996) couldn't have been further removed, its jazz influences and high-octane energy channelled into sunnier climes. Unlike piano quintets, guitar quintets are more homogenous, and here Grigoryan presided but never prevailed as his guitar's mellow influence seemingly permeated the sonic consciousness of his fellow players.

György Ligeti's *String Quartet No 1* (1954) is an iconic classic with which the ASQ has developed a strong affinity. They illuminated its Bartok-plus edgy, plangent language with immense understanding and stark clarity.

With scant reference to the music in our program notes, listeners deserved to know more about the little-known Charles Horsley's *String Quartet in C*, written in Australia in 1862. But the ASQ's sparkling performance certainly dispelled doubts that this significant work deserves greater familiarity.