

Review of Alleged Dances, 29 Feb 2016, Adelaide Town Hall
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Elizabeth Silsbury



AUSTRALIAN
STRING
QUARTET



A jewel in the classical crown

**ALLEGED DANCES
AUSTRALIAN
STRING QUARTET**
[MUSIC]
Festival
Adelaide Town Hall,
February 29

CELEBRATIONS were in order for our country's only fully funded, full-time string quartet on Monday night.

Most worthy of celebration is that Monday marked the debut of a full, permanent complement after a wobbly period following the precipitous resignation of the two violinists.

Worth waiting for are newcomers leader Dale Barltrop and second Francesca Hiew, centre, joining stayers Stephen King (viola) and Sharon Draper (cello). They present as four well-matched individuals, respectful of each other's musical rights, all imbued with that mysterious

empathy that runs between and around string quartetters. Barltrop is an unobtrusive leader, subtle but fully effective, so the ensemble is smooth and secure.

Their how-do-you-do program might have been chosen to display their credentials, as well as to appeal to as wide a public as possible.

You want classical? Here is the last in one of Beethoven's set of six, written near the end of the 19th century, *String Quartet in B flat op 18 no 6*, by his own claim proof, that he had mastered the form. Strict attention to structure, careful balance between busy and passive, notably in the long, complex last movement, a zingy Scherzo and impressive, tasteful restraint on the *sforzando*, too often overstressed and thereby putting its surroundings out of kilter.

You want novelty and

patriotism – plus a serve of family sentiment? Try *String Quartet no 4 for String Quartet* and percussion by Australian Matthew Hindson, with perfect-fit Claire Edwardes on vibraphone. The Alleged in *John Adams's Alleged Dances* refers to his belief that the steps to them had not yet been invented. They have since been choreographed but their sound says guilty as charged.

Finally, the full bottle Romantic – *Schumann's String Quartet in A minor op 41 no 1*.

Back to formal structures, conventional beat divisions, closely related keys, languorous melodies and clear themes; ASQ's dance card, for this event at least, is full.

Welcome to the new Australian String Quartet.

Long may she reign as our very own crown jewel of chamber music.

ELIZABETH SILSBURY