



The Australian
Thursday 3/09/2015

Page: 15
Section: Arts & Entertainment
Region: Australia, AU
Circulation: 104774
Type: National
Size: 194.00 sq.cms.



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Glorious tones from one we let get away

MUSIC

Australian String Quartet:
Abundance
Conservatorium Theatre,
Brisbane, September 1.

MARTIN BUZACOTT

Falling in love with your cousin can do strange things to a man, judging by Anton Webern's *Langsamer Satz*.

Head over heels, the future miniaturist-doyen of the Second Viennese School did the unthinkable and wrote a great tune, made even greater in this Australian String Quartet concert by the presence of guest leader Susie Park.

A world-class artist, the US-based Australian's sweet-toned, finely balanced violin playing was the highlight of this penultimate tour before the ASQ becomes an ensemble of permanent members again next year after a bizarre season featuring guest violinists.

Webern's spellbinding late romantic lush-fest wasn't the only example of a composer out of his wits in this concert of music on the edge of a nervous breakdown. Mozart composed part of his D minor Quartet K421 while his wife was in labour, and in its uncharacteristic hesitance you can practically hear the first-time expectant father pacing the waiting-room floor and not exactly relishing the life ahead.

Politely performed while the ASQ-for-the-night got to know each other, Park's gloriously singing tone began to emerge in the third movement, but it was Mozart in such an unsettled and introspective mood that its half-hour duration seemed very long.

Matthew Hindson's String Quartet No 3, *Ngeringa*, was three-quarters familiar territory of twitchy, throw-the-kitchen-sink-at-it sense of generalised excitement, with the odd groove and then the obligatory helter-



Susie Park

skelter finale. Then, in the third movement, the frantic gesturing stops and the music and audience alike are left to breathe, in what is perhaps a timely reassurance to the composer himself that, while the recently graduated marketers won't like it, the best bits of chamber music are usually those that aren't trying to imitate rock.

In any case, Hindson earned a bigger ovation than Mozart, and the work probably would prove even more popular if its banal and distracting program in which each movement captures a perspective on the Ngeringa Cultural Centre in the Adelaide Hills was ditched.

So it was all about worked-up composers, but none had so legitimate a cause as Smetana, whose full-blooded String Quartet No 1, *From My Life*, was written after the onset of deafness.

Cue Park's jaw-droppingly beautiful solo in the third movement and Sharon Draper's meaty cello preceding it, with guest second violin Brendan Joyce and permanent violist Stephen King contributing a solid middle, and some fun foot-stomping in the polka.

How did Australia let Park get away?

Program repeated in Melbourne, tonight; then Adelaide, September 7; Perth, September 8.