



AUSTRALIAN
STRING
QUARTET

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Boundless Review

THE WEST AUSTRALIAN

NEVILLE COHN *The West Australian* August 15, 2014, 10:37 am

CONCERT

Australian String Quartet

4.5 stars



Perth Concert Hall, Mon 13 August 2014

REVIEW NEVILLE COHN

Haydn was an old man when he embarked on his opus 77. It was to have consisted of six quartets - but although the great composer's creative juices were flowing as abundantly as ever, his physical strength was not up to the demands made on it and only two of the quartets eventuated.

On Wednesday, the first of the two opus 77 works was played by a blissfully in-form Australian String Quartet. And if through some miracle of time travel, it would have been possible for Haydn himself to have been present, he would, I am sure, have been greatly pleased.

It was a model performance by four musicians at the top of their game, playing on four superb Guaragnini instruments crafted between 1743 and 1784.

In *Return of the Native*, novelist Thomas Hardy gives a fascinating description of the sounds of nocturnal insects and small mammals in the undergrowth of Egdon Heath.

In the second movement of his String Quartet No 5, Bartok achieves much the same in sonic terms, in an instance of his famous "night music". Here, the ASQ focussed fascinatingly on the minute trills and scurrings of Bartok's score. It was the perfect foil to the first movement, music of great individuality and power that fairly sizzled with intensity as forthright, powerful strokes of the bows sent arrows of rich tone into the auditorium. Throughout this cruelly demanding work, the ASQ sounded entirely at home, adjusting to the composer's requirements with rare skill.

Beethoven's opus 95 is the shortest of all his quartets, an instance of creativity at its most concise. The ASQ's handling of the opening allegro con brio was masterly and the performance as a whole was informed as much by complete physical control of the medium as in revealing the shifting interior moods of the work.

If ever a performance deserved a big turnout, it was this. There were far too few concertgoers to make this splendid ensemble welcome in Perth.