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Absorbing memorial

CONCERT

Australian String Quartet

Government House Ballroom

REVIEW **NEVILLE COHN**

Chief focus of the Australian String Quartet's concert at the weekend was a performance of Ross Edwards' Gallipoli which had been given its world premiere the night before in Albany.

A capacity audience listened in absorbed silence to Edwards' response in sound to the tragic World War I battle. Utterly devoid of militarism, the work came across primarily as a threnody, a memorial to so many young men, some of them more boys than adults, who died pointlessly in a bungled action directed from London.

Here were no sonic muscle flexings, gung ho attitudes or stirring marches. It was instead a meditation on loss, a quiet honouring of the dead. Midway, there's an episode of great intensity which gives way to elegiac musings. An eerie, sighing quality comes across as the quintessence of sadness. It is a tribute to too many lives cut short far too early — and for no discernible military gain.

Much of Shostakovich's Quartet No. 3 is informed by a searing intensity. In the first movement — "Calm unawareness of the coming cataclysm" — the musicians played, beautifully, a jovial little dance. But in "The forces of war unleashed", harshly confrontational ideas were revealed with brutal pizzicato which sounded as if ripped from the body of the instruments.

There was an almost palpable sense of desolation in the ASQ's presentation of the fourth movement — "Homage to the Dead" — and in the closing moments of the finale, the music faded into quietness.

On one of Haydn's numerous visits to London, he heard, and was greatly impressed by, God save the King. So he wrote an anthem of his own which was adopted by the Austro-Hungarian Empire — and he incorporated that melody into his Emperor Quartet. The adagio was heartfelt although there was less-than-secure intonation from the first violin.

This aside, the performance had a good deal going for it, especially the third movement which came across as a charming minuet — and grainy-toned, emphatic rhythms brought the work to a satisfying close. **t**



TRIBUTE Ross Edwards **PICTURE** BRIDGET ELLIOT