

Music



REVIEW: Finzi String Quartet

17th April 2010

It's an ill wind that blows from Iceland, but even a cloud of volcanic ash can have its silver lining.

The Czech-based Wihan Quartet was all set to take the final slot in the Plymouth Chamber Music Trust series, but was marooned in Prague. The Finzi Quartet was bound for Madrid, but was unable to fly, so, with some frantic eleventh-hour rescheduling, saved the day, much to the delight of the organisers and the packed audience assembled.

Opening with Haydn's Quartet in D from his Op 20 set, the all-girl quartet gave a polished performance which especially came to life in the minuet, with its quirky off-beats, and in the finale, despatched with great aplomb.

In a perfect world, Frank Bridge's Three Idylls wouldn't have seemed an ideal choice, since the previous visiting quartet had already included it in its programme. But the Finzi Quartet's playing was so direct and well-studied and, coming after the Haydn rather than opening the recital, imbued the work with a welcome freshness.

The evening's highlight was a quite superb reading of Debussy's String Quartet, where an impeccable ensemble and almost impossible-to-achieve dynamic range made this a truly memorable performance to end sixteen seasons of top-quality chamber music, with an arrangement of Finzi's serene Romance, Op 11, providing not only a generous encore, but also an aptly uplifting and propitious epilogue.

PHILIP R BUTTALL

