

Music



Herold String Quartet in Plymouth (review)

09th February 2009

Had the Herold Quartet's playing been under par, there might have been a good reason.

Their Prague flight was delayed, and then subject to an unscheduled stopover on Haldon Hill during the recent snow.

All this, together with still having to fit in a concert in Penzance beforehand, might have seen the players arrive, suffering from severe sleep deprivation, worsened by the absence of some good Czech beer!

However, their recital must certainly go down as one of the best quartet performances in Plymouth Chamber Music's history.

Opening with Haydn's Lark Quartet, there was a welcome freshness, characterised by warmly expressive playing in the Adagio, and dazzling virtuosity in the Finale.

Smetana's Second Quartet is no easy work to communicate, but the passionate and intense performance seemed completely at one with the composer's torment at the time of writing.

Lubos Sluka's Fourth Quartet proved a delightful find, written in 2003, but so successfully combining modernism with accessibility.

The Slavic Gods appeared to have one further challenge left, when the cello's bottom string broke right at the end of the closing work, Janacek's Intimate Letters Quartet.

But the string was promptly replaced, the whole movement replayed, and a quite scintillating performance of the Finale of Dvorak's American Quartet generously given as an encore.

Clearly these players loved what they were doing, and this is what it's all about!

PHILIP R BUTTALL