

Atesh String Quartet - October 8th, 2015

The first concert of Carlisle Music Society's new season brought a highly accomplished young string quartet to St. Cuthbert's Church. The Atesh Quartet was only formed last year at the RNCM, and it is remarkable that they have already achieved a sure technical grasp of quartet playing and demonstrate considerable musical insight into their repertoire.

Mozart's thirteen early quartets, composed in his teens, are usually passed over in favour of the ten celebrated quartets written over ten years later so it was refreshing to hear his Quartet in G K.156 – three movements of unpretentious charm. An easy sense of ensemble and well-managed balance between the parts characterised the whole piece. Jake Phillips despatched the first violin part in convincing style – always neat and producing a clear sound without dominating the quartet. Elaine Ambridge and Rhiannon James on second violin and viola always kept the core sound of the quartet alive and cellist Maya Kashif ensured that the pulse of the vital bass line never flagged.

A hundred and fifty years after Mozart Janacek wrote two of the most extraordinary quartets of the twentieth century. His First Quartet was inspired by Tolstoy's powerful story *The Kreutzer Sonata* and evokes some of the emotional turmoil of a dysfunctional marriage, a suspected lover and a jealous husband. Janacek's unique writing for the quartet produces a kaleidoscope of moods that he creates with moments of intense desire abruptly switching to ethereal sul ponticello effects (pangs of temptation), then gentle affection and a final violent climax. The complex rhythmic and ensemble difficulties were managed impressively, and the sudden changes of tempo and dynamics were really well understood by all four players. The scope for highly charged interpretation of this music is wide and the Atesh Quartet will no doubt develop their ideas in time. Considering they are comparatively new to the piece this was an exciting and secure account of turbulent music.

Beethoven's Quartet in D op.18 no.3 ended the concert in fine style. The first movement flowed easily with each player clearly projecting their solo lines. An excellent blend of tone gave the slow movement just the right degree of gravitas while the capricious finale sparkled. The technical control of the lively tempo was maintained to the last chord and the sense of fun it created sent everyone home with a lighter step.

John Upson