

THE DANTE QUARTET

16 March 2017

The Dante Quartet was warmly welcomed when it gave the last of this season's concerts for the Minehead and West Somerset Arts Society in the Minehead Methodist Church Hall on Thursday 16th March. It is always a pleasure to hear this group – Krysia Osostowicz and Oscar Perks, violins, Yuko Inoue, viola, and Richard Jenkinson, cello – and their programme this time did not disappoint.

The evening began with Haydn's String Quartet in E flat, Op 33 No 2, nicknamed 'The Joke' and the reason for this became clear when we reached the fourth movement, with its unexpected pauses and sudden ending, which made the audience laugh. Right from the beginning of the piece Haydn's musical genius and technical mastery had been evident, showing why he is known as the 'Father of the String Quartet'. This light-hearted music made an appropriate start to the evening.

The next work on the programme was Bartok's String Quartet No 4, but by way of introduction Krysia and Oscar played three of his short Duos for Two Violins. These charming miniatures, each lasting only a minute or two, were written as useful practice for young students, but they gave us a foretaste of the Quartet. This piece was very different from the Haydn, challenging us in many ways. Bartok wrote it in 1928, but the idiom is so modern it is hard to realise that its first performance was given nearly 90 years ago, also an age of much upheaval in the world.

The excellent rapport between the members of the Quartet was much in evidence here, enabling them to cope well with the technical challenges the piece presented. Much of it was hard to understand at a first hearing, but, from comments made in the interval, it was clear that many had enjoyed its vigour and excitement.

The final work, after the interval, was Beethoven's String Quartet in B flat Op 130, one of the composer's last major works, and part of a commission from Prince Nikolai Golitzin. Beethoven's late string quartets are often considered difficult to appreciate, but the performance we heard from the Dante Quartet was tuneful and approachable. Unusually for a string quartet from that era, it has six movements, several of them dance movements, giving the composer more scope for variety. As Oscar told us before the performance, Beethoven originally wrote a long and complicated last movement, now published separately as the Grosse Fuge, which at the first performance proved difficult for both the original performers and the audience. Beethoven then substituted a shorter movement, which we heard at the concert, a light-hearted movement which brought a fascinating evening to a satisfactory close, to resounding applause.

JML