DAVID ROWE
ARTISTS

CASTALIAN STRING QUARTET

This press book contains (in order):

- Artist bio
- Press excerpts
- Full reviews (beginning with the most recent)

NOTES: When searching for suitable pull-quotes, be sure to check through the "Full reviews" section. The "Press excerpts" are not comprehensive, and do not necessarily display the best selections.

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CASTALIAN QUARTET

Sini Simonen violin
Daniel Roberts violin
Charlotte Bonneton viola
Christopher Graves cello

"A powerful individuality of sound matched by an instinctive singularity of musical intention"
*– **The Scotsman***

In the eight years since its formation, the London-based Castalian Quartet has distinguished itself as one of the most dynamic, sophisticated young string quartets performing today. Recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's 2019 Young Artists Award, the Quartet also received the prestigious inaugural Merito String Quartet Award and Valentin Erben Prize in 2018, has won a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship Award, and is beginning to gain international acclaim as they take their talents abroad.

In the 2019/20 season, the Castalian Quartet is joined at Wigmore Hall by guest artists Stephen Hough, Cédric Tiberghien, Michael Collins, Nils Mönkemeyer, Isabel Charisius and Ursula Smith to perform the chamber music of Brahms and Schumann. In Spring 2020, they will return to New York to perform on Carnegie Hall's Weill stage, and will have two full-scale North American tours in the 2020-2021 season.

Other recent highlights include performances of the complete Haydn Op.76 Quartets at Wigmore Hall, concerts in the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Heidelberger Frühling, East Neuk, Zwischentöne Festival in Engelberg, Neuchatel Chamber Music in Switzerland and Banff International Festivals. Further afield they undertook tours of China and Colombia.

Formed in 2011, the Castalian Quartet studied with Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartet) at the Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media, graduating with a Master's degree. In addition to the above, awards include 3rd Prize at the 2016 Banff Quartet Competition and 1st Prize at the 2015 Lyon Chamber Music Competition. The Quartet was selected by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2016. They have received coaching from Simon Rowland-Jones, David Waterman and Isabel Charisius. The Quartet was selected by YCAT in 2016.

2019-20 season

CASTALIAN QUARTET PRESS ACCLAIM

"...It was in Brahms' Clarinet Quintet [with Michael Collins] where they hit sublime heights. The strings had a burnished glow – perfect for that sense of mature ripeness – but it was the variety of colours the employed that impressed. (...) Gloomy old Brahms? No, this was Brahms revelling in October sunshine, drinking in the colours – and doubtless the fruits of the wine harvest – around him. Sheer bliss."
Bachtrack (5 stars) / **January 2020**

"... a feisty group, with a real personality and strong interpretative ideas"
Guardian / January 2020

Best of 2018: Classical concerts
"Abundant megatalent in works great and small… confirmation that the young Castalian Quartet is the new force to be reckoned with on the scene. "
The Arts Desk / East Neuk Festival / December 2018

"The real treat of the day came in a brilliant evening recital in Kilrenny Church by the excellent Castalian Quartet (*****).... their unique style – a powerful individuality of sound matched by an instinctive singularity of musical intention – lit up every single moment... A terrific programme; amazing players. "
The Scotsman / East Neuk Festival / June 2018

"….the Castalians, led by the seraphic Sini Simonen who seems to pull her inspiration straight down from the skies, lived every moment. Depth came in the moving introduction of Schumann's First, A minor Quartet and more surprises in his slow movement, even if the final impression is one of manic exuberance."
The Arts Desk / East Neuk Festival / June 2018

"Schumann's Op 41 No 1 quartet was nothing short of sensational, and in performance the Castalian proved why they are in such demand, not just at the East Neuk Festival, but world-wide….an absolutely mesmerising evening of chamber music."
Dundee Courier / East Neuk Festival / June 2018

"The Castalian Quartet makes the simplest things we hear into the most important things we could ever want to hear."
"Their level of ensemble inter-connectedness in the Adès and at times in the subsequent movements of Brahms and Schumann was truly remarkable in evincing a physics most rare and special, overlaid with an emotional world of similarly surpassing sublimity. There were times that I simply could not believe my ears."
Calgary Herald / Banff International Competition / September 2016

THE TIMES

June 10, 2019

"....The Castalian Quartet were livelier still in Saturday's concert in Aldeburgh church, wonderfully expressive in looks and sound in Britten, Haydn and a festival commission from Edmund Finnis, *Aloysius*, formally categorised as his String Quartet No. 1. Given its affecting rocking patterns, expressive musings on gravely beautiful polyphony by Byrd, and the natural ease of its writing for strings, I now look forward to Quartets 2, 3, and 4."

Geoff Brown

Castalian String Quartet at Wigmore Hall – Haydn – the last three Quartets of Opus 76

Wednesday, July 25, 2018 Wigmore Hall, London
Reviewed by Antony Hodgson

This was the final concert in Wigmore Hall's Haydn String Quartet Series in which a considerable number of these compositions have been given by various performers, and many reviewed here on Classical Source (search "Haydn String Quartets Wigmore Hall Classical Source"). Differences of approach by distinguished ensembles have helped to illuminate the essence of these masterpieces. The Castalian String Quartet previously performed the first three of Opus 76 – memorable for a superb interpretation of the 'Emperor' Quartet – and its completion of the set was of a similar high standard and full of insight.

A characteristic of the players' sound is one of elegance, retained even when the music becomes fast and furious, and there is many a passage like that in Opus 76. No.1 opens in utmost calm however and there was rare beauty as Sini Simonen climbed from quietness and began to illuminate the day, the subtitle 'Sunrise' entirely justified and the bright forte outburst was all the more effective for being kept at the same measured tempo. In the Adagio, gentleness of tone expressed the serious nature of the music ideally and the modesty with which vibrato is used made the serenity all the more effective. The Minuet is marked Allegro but it was not hurried (I have a feeling that nowadays performers are moving away from hasty approaches to such movements) and this made the onward drive of the Finale all the more effective.

In No.5 Haydn uses a fast ending to an opening movement (an effect anticipated in the reading of the previous work). This Allegretto, taken swiftly, has a much decorated main theme leading to an Allegro which surges excitingly forward. The following Largo cantabile was performed with grace and the Allegro Minuet was perfectly judged, allowing the delightful cello-led Trio to sound suitably grandfatherly in response. When Haydn writes Presto he means it and the Castalian members whipped the Finale along at great pace yet with absolute accuracy.

No.6 also begins with an Allegretto in variation form but this time the surprise at its close is a fugal Allegro. After performing the slow movement ('Fantasia') I appreciated the players not lowering their instruments for a long period; we needed time to reflect after such a gracious rendering. Presto is the requirement for the Minuet but this was controlled so that the very different middle section was kept in proportion, this is not a Trio but an Alternativo – a term used in Baroque times. As for the final Allegro spirituoso, I have never heard it taken so spectacularly fast yet it was absolutely precise and the golden tone was not compromised.

The high spirited atmosphere was retained in the encore – the Finale of Opus 76/1. As in their complete performance in April (link below), the players indulged a whim, slowing greatly for the quaint pizzicato passage that comes just before the end – delightful, and ideal to finish in great good humour.

bachtrack

The art of good conversation: an engaging evening of Haydn with the Castalian Quartet

By Mark Pullinger, 18 April 2018

We've all played the "dream dinner party guest list" game. I'd invite a witty raconteur like Victoria Coren-Mitchell or Stephen Fry to keep things lively; a dashing sporting hero, a glamorous soprano – no names! – and maybe a critic well into his anecdotage to spill scurrilous opera gossip. Everyone would make entertaining contributions, but nobody would hog the floor. Now apply that art of good conversation to string quartet writing and nobody – not even Mozart – does it better than Joseph Haydn.

Too often Haydn plays second fiddle to Mozart, although – ironically – when they played quartets together with Dittersdorf and Vanhal, it was Haydn who played first violin and Mozart who played the viola! Wolfgang's symphonies get programmed far more often in concert halls, as do the quartets, although Haydn was the father of both genres. Perhaps his prolific output – 68 string quartets – presents too much choice? What a joy, then, that Wigmore Hall is celebrating "Papa" Haydn's quartets with a series of recitals spanning his career. They are sometimes programmed with other composers, at others – as here with the Castalian String Quartet – taking the solo spotlight.

The six Op.76 string quartets are from Haydn's final creative period. They were published in 1799 with a dedication to Count Joseph Erdödy and were well received, Charles Burney proclaiming they were "full of invention, fire, good taste and new effects". The Castalian played the first three of the set (they tackle the other half in July) and Burney's admission that he "had never received more pleasure from instrumental music" could hardly have rung truer, so splendid were the performances.

The Castalian played with little vibrato, resulting in lithe, crisp accounts that never felt too weighty nor too rushed. Once the triple-chord opening of the G major quartet was dispatched, gentle conversation broke out straight away, the four players taking turns, like the entries of a fugue, to make their introductions. Charlotte Bonneton's velvet viola tone was the lynchpin, keeping the dialogue flowing, driving the debate. There was gravity aplenty for the serious, almost Beethovenian Adagio, while the Ländler-like violin figure for the third movement's Trio section found Sini Simonen soaring, despite the odd moment of insecure intonation. The muscular G minor finale put a rare scowl on Haydn's face before the false ending gave way to a delicate, tripping melody to see the quartet end in twinkling humour.

Two falling fifths at the start give the D major provide the quartet with its "Fifths" nickname, its austere first movement given a business-like rendition, alert but never driven too hard. After a delicate Andante, the spiky Minuet – sometimes called the "Witches' Minuet" – rasped vigorously. The Hungarian gypsy-style finale – characterised by its stamps and pauses – chattered merrily, Christopher Graves' sleek cello tone adding to the banter.

The finest of the first three Op.76 quartets – arguably of the entire set – is the C major no. 3. Its nickname of "The Emperor" is drawn from the second movement, where Haydn employed his own hymn tune "Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser" (God save the Emperor Franz), the former Austrian national anthem. It starts with the two violinists in cantabile duet, Simonen and Daniel Roberts dovetailed perfectly. The Castalian performed the opening movement with plenty of spirit, especially the central sections where Haydn slips some rural gossip into the conversation, throwing in a heavy peasant dance complete with wheezy drone, amusingly executed. After further rustic capers in the Minuet, the Presto finale was a little brusque, perhaps our host indicating that it was time for us to call our carriages and head home. Good dinner guests never outstay their welcome but the Castalian fully deserve their July return invitation.

The Herald

Music review: Castalian String Quartet, Perth Concert Hall, four stars

By Keith Bruce @keithjbruce
Arts Editor
27th March 2018

WHEN those who make it their business to encourage young musicians are unanimous in their endorsement of a young chamber group, there is usually a good reason for it.

Led by Finnish violinist Sini Simonen, with a French viola player, Charlotte Bonneton, and two British blokes, violinist Daniel Roberts and cellist Christopher Graves, the Castalian Quartet have been championed by the Young Classical Artists Trust and won a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship among a string of other established and highly-regarded stepping stones. They have played a string of dates for the music clubs and societies funded by Enterprise Music Scotland and will be appearing this summer at the East Neuk Festival in Fife, with one concert in partnership with pianist Christian Zacharias. Next month they are at London's Wigmore Hall to play three of Haydn's Opus 76 quartets.

They opened their lunchtime recital in Perth – which attracted the sort of attendance that suggests that the good word had already reached the Fair City – with the third of those, which has the Emperor's Hymn (the tune used for the German national anthem), and variations upon it, as its slow second movement. The lightness of touch the lower strings brought to the first and third movements was particularly striking, set against a folkie edge to Simonen's playing of the opening Allegro. Come the finale, however, it was the bold ensemble sound of the big opening chords that repeat at the end that stuck in the mind.

Schumann's Opus 41 Quartets were a 23rd birthday present to his beloved Clara and come from the time of his first symphonic writing, which is particularly obvious in the hugely expressive arc of the second movement of the last of them, which the Castalians played here (Kilrenny Church will hear the first at East Neuk at the end of June). A much darker tone is required throughout, and Bonneton revelled in the brooding melody line she has in the Adagio, before some of Haydn's influence reasserted itself in the comparatively brighter – but still far from unambiguous – finale.

the Strad
ESSENTIAL READING FOR THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

14 MARCH 2018

Castalian String Quartet wins inaugural Merito String Quartet Award worth €45,000

Professional development award headed by Alban Berg Quartet cellist Valentin Erben, is based on secret observation of eligible quartets

The Castalian Quartet, left to right, Charlotte Bonneton, Christopher Graves, Sini Simonen and Daniel Roberts ©Kaupo-Kikkas

The Castalian String Quartet, based in London, has been announced as the winner of the first Merito String Quartet Award/Valentin Erben Prize which carries €20,000 professional development prize, along with a further €25,000 towards sound recordings and a commission.

The award will be officially presented at the Wiener Konzerthaus on 23 April 2018, where the quartet will perform works by Haydn and Schumann.

There was no application process or competition for the award, but instead a secret jury assembled a shortlist of five quartets which were then observed in at least two concerts during the course of a year, always without the musicians' knowledge.

According to the award announcement, 'The aspects that were evaluated included their professional approach, repertoire, programming, the artistic quality of the concerts, their musical profile, and also the imagination and innovation displayed by the musicians. Their artistic career to date and recordings, where applicable, were also evaluated.'

The award is an initiative of Wolfgang Habermayer, owner of Merito Financial Solutions, and Valentin Erben, founding cellist of the Alban Berg Quartet.

'The critical factor for us is how the young musicians behave in "everyday life" on the concert stage,' said Erben. 'We will now accompany and support the winning quartet professionally for four years to secure success on the international stage,' Habermayer added.

Of the Castalian Quartet, Erben commented: 'The human warmth and aura radiated by these four young people played a key role. They are never just putting on a show – the music is always close to their heart. You can feel their intense passion for playing in a quartet.'

As an optional addition to the award, Erben has offered the loan of four instruments by German luthier Stefan-Peter Greiner, the choice of Christian Tetzlaff among others.

The Castalian Quartet was also recently awarded a £20,000 fellowship from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust.

CALGARY HERALD
PROUDLY CALGARY SINCE 1883

BISQC Day 2: Castalian Quartet shines, Quartet Berlin-Tokyo superb in their Bartók entries

STEPHAN BONFIELD
Updated: August 31, 2016
Excerpt:

"Castalian Quartet's playing of [Bartók's] String Quartet No. 6 was a case in point. From Charlotte Bonneton's haunting viola solo that begins the work, Castalian showed the strongest composure in handling the many abstract and heartfelt uses of that opening idea. They delivered the highest quality narrative of the Bartók 6 I have heard at BISQC in a very long time.

The opening of the second movement was ethereal in every way, and the best so far we've heard at the competition — gorgeous tuning but also a sense of how to carry you from one theme to another with gentle transitions. The quartet owes a lot to first violinist Sini Simonen — what an outstanding and rare musician she is.

And that third movement! Just gloppingly heartfelt with exquisite and again, perfect, emotionally sensitive, exquisite tuning, this time from second violinist Daniel Roberts, especially on those "Bulgarese" chords — impossibly good. It was another remarkable interpretation that ought to have stolen the heart of any honest Bartók fan.

But the fourth movement simply took the prize yesterday. What a lovely opening — suspenseful throughout, using a spectacular array of different interpretive thoughts and angles, all contrasting in style and phrase shape, and all interesting simply from our perspective of how to make a close reading of the score. This group came out and established themselves as the quartet to beat, with everything going right for them in their sound — such conspicuous middle voices in viola and second violin contributing to a darker hue I couldn't get enough of. I can't wait to hear them again Wednesday when they play their Ravel."