Concerts in the West

Ruisi Quartet

Ilminster Arts Centre

Friday 15 November

Although the weather was cold and damp in Ilminster on Friday evening with a cloud-covered sky, there were four bright stars that brought warmth and much light to the capacity audience gathered in The Arts Centre to hear the Ruisi Quartet. Alessandro Ruisi (violin), Oliver Cave (violin), Luba Tunnicliffe (viola) and Max Ruisi (cello) were the finale to the 2019 Season (the 14th) for Concerts in the West.

Ruisi Quartet opened with Benjamin Britten’s *Three Divertimenti,* an ambitious early work from the 1930s intended to be a suite of five musical portraits of school friends. Britten was disappointed by the reception that the incomplete work received at its first performance in 1936. Whatever reservation the original audience felt was not repeated at Ilminster. The Ruisi Quartet lit the fuses of the opening *March* andconcluding *Burlesque* and demonstrated not only Britten’s meticulous craftsmanship but also the co-ordinated skills of the quartet. There was collective rhythmic precision, unity of accents and appropriate tonal brilliance in these movements with a counterpoint of lilt and ease in the *Waltz.*

The Haydn Quartet in B minor Op 64 took us back to 1790, the cradle period of string quartet writing. Britten’s work was the outcome of a young talent susceptible to criticism but searching for a role other than a run-of-the-mill musician. As this work suggests, Haydn, too, at the age of fifty-seven, was looking for personal conviction and development in his own craft. The ambivalence of major and minor keys and the nervousness of the opening movement, the lyricism of the slow movement, the rural-dance character of the *Menuet* and the nervous energy of the *Finale* suggest a spirit not just content with previous achievements and conventions. Ruisi responded to these elements of restlessness with an instinctiveness born of skill and experience.

Mendelssohn’s early and precocious ability is well understood. In writing a quartet with such technical and expressive assurance, the 18-year-old Felix demonstrated how his natural abilities were immeasurably enhanced by his close study of the music of Bach and Beethoven. The cyclical structure of musical material lends organic unity to this 30-minute work; his fugue writing in the slow movement is ambitious but sits perfectly within the overall scheme. The movement proved to be one of the high points for Ruisi. They demonstrated great technical control and imbued the fugue theme with care and expression.

As Concerts in the West moves into its new season it can reflect on the Ruisi Quartet’s visit as something of a perfect *coda* to a 2019 series full of carefully thought-through programming: quality musicians with quality music.

www.ruisiquartet.com

www.concertsinthewest.org

Andrew Maddocks