



[Fauré Piano Quartet @ St George's Hall](#)

Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) February 2011

Dirk Mommertz *Piano*
Erika Geldsetzer *Violin*
Sascha Froembling *Viola*
Konstanin Heidrich *Cello*

Mozart - *Piano Quartet in G minor K478*
Mahler - *Quartet Movement in A minor*
Mozart - *Piano Quartet in Eb major K493*

One way at looking at classical music (that umbrella tag for art/composed music) is to see the music as a discussion, debate or argument. The latter view is particularly noticeable in concertos, where the solo instrument (or group of instruments) is pitted against the orchestra. It is as if what we are experiencing is the individual finding their way in society with the orchestra perceived as the collective.

A dialogue can also be clearly heard in chamber music, where the instrumental forces are smaller. The intimacy of chamber music creates a dialectic of the individual voices at once asserting themselves whilst at the same time, working, *ūnīversus*, to create a performance. The mark of success for any ensemble is to pull this off convincingly, and the Fauré Piano Quartet certainly managed this with panache and skill in this concert.

The musicians founded the Fauré Quartet in 1995 taking this name out of appreciation for the composer's two piano quartet pieces. It did not take the quartet long to win top prizes and awards such as the Deutsche *Schallplattenpreis* and the *Parkhouse Award* in Great Britain. They have recently received the *Echo Klassik Prize* twice in a row, the only ensemble in history to do so.

What the group achieved in this performance was to illustrate just how inspired and fresh the two Mozart pieces are, even though they date from 1787. Cast in the dramatic key of G minor, the first quartet cannot be said to be easy listening. The opening piano chords tell us that this is not simply entertainment but a serious statement. In this *allegro* there is a concerto feeling, with the piano, seemingly in a state of agitation with the other instruments and as we reach the end of this movement each instrument seems to defiantly declare its position.

The *andante* opens with the most beautifully imagined of music. The piano leads us into a realm of calm, where it and the violin dominate. For me this is one of Mozart's most captivating pieces

of music and, when all the instruments take up the music, four minutes into the andante, it is not hard to just close your eyes and realise that the world is such a heavenly place.

I couldn't help remembering Lenin's words on Beethoven's *Appassionata* "Wonderful, immortal music. I always think, with perhaps a naive, childish pride, how can man create such wonders?"

The final movement *rondo (allegro)*, finds a more contented feeling, almost as if the angst of the opening movement had been forgotten and for the first 4m 30 secs, there is still a debate but one that does not seem so much like a fight and is more a gentlemanly dispute. But within the movement voices are raised. The piano opens the movement with a theme that suggests it has found an area of agreement and the bow-stringed instruments take up the theme and by the close there is a resolution.

Mozart received a commission for three quartets in 1785 from the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister. Hoffmeister thought this first quartet was too difficult and that the public would not buy it, so he released Mozart from the obligation of completing the set.

A report of 1788, told of a concert given by amateur musicians, whilst praising Mozart's intentions it went on to say:

"[as performed by amateurs] it could not please: everybody yawned with boredom over the incomprehensible tintamarre of four instruments which did not keep together for four bars on end, and whose senseless concertus never allowed any unity of feeling; but it had to please, it had to be praised! ... what a difference when this much-advertised work of art is performed with the highest degree of accuracy by four skilled musicians who have studied it carefully."

Even though Mozart was released from his obligation he did go on to compose another Piano Quarter a year later.

Mozart's *Piano Quartet in Eb major K493* opens with a *tutti* effect that has the feeling of an orchestra. It does not have the sonorous feeling of the opening of the first Piano Quartet, the *allegro* draws us in, teasingly. There is concord amongst the instruments in this movement, which contrasts greatly with its predecessor, with each instrument taking up the theme, as if examining an object before commenting. About halfway through the movement the listener can discern a conflict but nothing like the aggression of the first quartet. By the end of the movement there a strong sense of unity as the piano and violin call on the cello and viola for confirmation. The movement closes with all four instruments affirming the point.

