



Roxburgh Quartet

11th February 2017

The Council Chamber at Kilmory once again resonated to sounds of exquisite music on Saturday evening. Played by the Roxburgh String Quartet, they performed works spanning more than one hundred and thirty years of musical history, while the audience experienced emotions from the happiness of childhood to deep tragedy and loss. Visiting mid Argyll in their 10th anniversary year, the Roxburgh Quartet has always nurtured their Scottish roots as they continue to bring the highest quality music to Mid-Argyll with their unaffected brilliance and secure musicianship.

The quartet began their programme with Beethoven's F major, op 18 no 1; a work marking this great composer's early ventures in writing for string quartet. Completed around 1798, it was revised to its present form in 1801 with a warning from the composer not to use the previous score saying 'I have greatly changed it, having just learned how to write quartets properly'. In 4 movements all the drama, humour, excitement and compositional adventures to be expected from a Beethoven work were revealed to the audience through the insightful playing of the Roxburgh team. As expected they showed impressive ensemble as the audience were delighted with a well balanced and virtuosic performance.

Shostakovich followed, with his first String quartet in C major, written in just 6 weeks in the summer of 1938. In this work the composer evokes his childhood. It is light hearted with a touch of playful and mischievous drama, and what may well be a game of hide and seek played out in the third movement. Through the four movements the work uses a 20th century harmonic idiom but frequently steps aside into what has been called 'Russian Neo-classicism': a wonderfully accessible echoing of the sounds of the 18th and 19th centuries. With a great sense of fun, the performers gave the audience a powerful sense of place, time and narrative of childhood play and adventure, while showing immense skill and touch in bringing to life the composer's ingenious musical textures. The performers once again showed both individually and collectively their great sensitivity to both the dramatic and the lyrical.

The mood darkened in the second half of the concert. Courageously Roxburgh chose to play Mendelssohn's last quartet; a work written following the tragic death of sister Fanny, his life companion and muse. Mendelssohn's deep anger and sense of injustice burns powerfully throughout this piece. The players were masters of the technical challenges set and achieved a good balancing of the first two movements, both of which are intensely fiery and virtuosic, giving little relief from his tirade, through neither change of tempo or pace. The pathos of the third movement was deeply felt by the players with the sense of hurt and anger returning undiluted in Mendelssohn's, all consuming Finale; a work in such great contrast to the composer's familiar output.

The Roxburgh quartet, after long applause, delighted the audience by playing an arrangement by Stamitz of the well known Scottish air, The Dark Island as their encore.