

# An Evening with Michael Kelly

Alix Goolden Performance Hall  
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**By Deryk Barker**

There are many musical occasions one would give almost anything to have attended and the evening in 1784 when a string quartet consisting of Haydn, Mozart, Dittersdorf and Wanhal performed at a house party given in Vienna by Stephen Storace, must surely be one of them.

Although the only account of the evening - written some four decades later by Irish tenor Michael Kelly - is somewhat sketchy on detail (to say the least), the assumption has always been that they would have played a selection of their most recent work.

Such is the notion behind the Eybler Quartet's putative reconstruction of that famous occasion. In the event, their programme consisted of two "sets" of four quartet movements (combining Haydn, Dittersdorf and Wanhal) followed, after the interval, by Mozart's quartet K.421, given in its entirety.

This was a fascinating idea and, even in the hands of a lesser quartet, could hardly fail to attract.

The Eybler Quartet, though, are anything but "lesser", as was immediately evident from the opening movement of the first set, from Dittersdorf's Quartetto I in D, which has something of the mood of the opening of Haydn's "Sunrise" quartet - albeit written a dozen years earlier. The Eyblers' smooth, silky tone, beautifully-controlled dynamics and razor-sharp ensemble - belying the fact that they have been playing together for just over three years - announced that we were in for something rather special.

As the evening progressed I could not help but wonder what that original Viennese audience would have made of the contrasts between the two great geniuses and their merely extremely-talented colleagues - indeed, can there be a more profound gap than that between the genius and the merely talented?

Clearly all four composers breathed the same musical air - none of Dittersdorf's or Wanhal's melodies would have felt out of place in a quartet by Haydn or Mozart. The difference is in what the respective composers did with their basic material and, while Dittersdorf and Wanhal were never less than highly competent and even included some original and surprising touches, it is very obvious why we still hear Haydn and Mozart regularly today, but their contemporaries far less often.

Despite some wonderfully humorous playing in the Haydn movements - we got to hear the whole of his Op.33 No.2, the "Joke", complete with some marvellously playful

*glissandi* in the trio from Aisslinn Nosky - there was no doubt that the highlight of the evening was the Mozart.

K.421 in d minor is the second of the group of quartets Mozart dedicated to Haydn and was composed in June 1783, the year before Storace's musical evening.

Like the Piano Concerto, K.466, with which it shares its key signature, K.421 is a melancholy and profoundly uneasy work, the sunny trio of the third movement providing a rare contrast.

The Eyblers gave a wonderful account of this great quartet, their playing was superbly-controlled, yet conveyed the gamut of the emotions contained in the music, from the tragic opening movement to the unsettled, yet defiant close. The stunning slow movement featured some quite delectable half tones from all four players.

For their well-deserved encore, the Eyblers played a short movement from a quartet by their namesake, Joseph Leopold Edler von Eybler. This proved to be quite lovely, particularly the delectable viola solo with pizzicato accompaniment.

Until some genius of quantum physics invents a time machine, this is the closest any of us is ever likely to get to feeling just how special that night in Vienna in 1784 really was.

<http://www.horizon.bc.ca/miv/reviews/r2008-01-12-dgrb.html>