

Currently seeking instruments

‘IT’S NO SECRET THAT FINE, BEAUTIFUL instruments are half of the success of any musician.’ Anton Ilyunin, second violinist of the Atrium Quartet, describes the group’s ongoing search for the instruments that will help them realise their musical vision. He goes into intimate detail on the particular need for instruments of an equally high quality in a string quartet: ‘Historically the two violins always live together, and we can say the same about the cello and viola. Nevertheless, depending on the score, the violins can imitate the viola sound, or the other way round – sometimes the viola or cello needs to play like the first violin. That’s why it is so important to have the best instruments with the fullest range of possible sounds.’ The quartet players are delighted to have been taken under

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the wing of the Stradivari Trust, and are currently searching the world for the right instruments to satisfy their musical needs.

Not that Ilyunin and his colleagues – violinist Alexey Naumenko, violist Dmitry Pitulko and cellist Anna Gorelova – haven’t already made a big impact. The quartet is happy to cover any terrain, with tours in Europe, Japan and America approaching and a new recording of music by the Spanish composer Jordi Cervello to be released shortly. Ilyunin says the group welcomes the chance to reach out to their listeners: ‘We love performing in big concert halls, on big stages. It gives so many possibilities in the range of dynamics, nuances and technique. But another important thing for us is the audience.

We should always feel we have direct contact with it and the capacity for emotional exchange.’

Ilyunin gives a fascinating glimpse into the often strange relationship between performer and an apparently discerning audience when he recounts one of the quartet’s clearest memories: ‘A couple of years ago we performed one of Tchaikovsky’s quartets – no.2 – in the second half of a concert in southern Europe. Everybody was happy in the concert hall; we had a very warm reception and received many compliments. It was only much later that evening that one of us noticed that

Tchaikovsky’s Quartet no.3 had been advertised on the huge poster in front of the building. None of the organisers or audience members noticed it! Since then, we have always checked the concert listing before entering the concert hall.’

Despite his awareness that artists must take their relationship with the public seriously, one suspects the humour of this incident didn’t pass the quartet members by. Ilyunin also recounts a light-hearted group philosophy, ‘Just enjoy the moment!’ The group seems happy to focus primarily on what they can achieve now but it’s clear they yearn for instruments to match their driving ambition. ‘We had an incredible experience in Washington’s Library of Congress when we were given the opportunity to perform on three Stradivari instruments and Kreisler’s Guarneri. That was the greatest hour of our lives.’

Mark Austin





from left to right: Anton
Ilyunin, Anna Gorelova,
Dmitry Pitulko and
Alexey Naumenko

Atrium Quartet