

Review: Doric String Quartet; Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, York University

8:27am Wednesday 22nd February 2012

By Martin Dreyer

In those palmy days when the university boasted a resident string quartet, the Lyons was always full.

Now it is only the British Music Society that regularly satisfies that need. The appearance of the Dorics predictably drew a nearly-full house on Friday.

They had plenty to live up to: they were a hit when they first appeared here three years ago. Could a menu of Haydn, Chausson and Schubert do the trick again? Rhetorical question. The group was in cracking form.

Haydn is never an easy starter, despite convention. Anything untidy shows at once. But even in the Allegro's Sturm Und Drang (storm and stress) passages, the Dorics kept shape and balance.

The slow movement's harmonic slippages did not faze them either. Haydn's humour in the finale was cutting-edge in 1772. In this group's hands, it still is.

Ernest Chausson's only quartet is a tougher nut. Much thought had clearly gone into the rambling first movement.

Precise light and shade dappled the trees. But we hardly saw the wood. The brittle two songs that follow were intoxicatingly perfumed, ending in deepest repose. The last (extant) movement was refreshingly vital, the voices bobbing in and out.

Spontaneity was uppermost in Schubert's D minor (Death And The Maiden). The eponymous theme was chorale-like, given without vibrato, a lament ending positively in a marvellous triple piano. The finale, at breakneck pace, was still astonishingly articulate. Don't wait three years to return, lads.