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# London International String Quartet Competition, Wigmore Hall - review

Nick Kimberley



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You might have thought a talent contest altogether too vulgar for the Wigmore Hall, but classical music has always embraced gladiatorial competition. The London International String Quartet Competition has taken place every three years since 1979; success is no guarantee of fame and fortune but several previous winners (the Takács, the Hagen) have had major careers.

This year, 10 quartets were in the running at the start; only three got through to the final. The Meccorre String Quartet (Polish) literally stood out from the rest: only the cellist played sitting down. In Schubert's Death and the Maiden, the opening attack was loud and vehement, the sound resonant. Elsewhere, aggression gave way to delicacy, but at times the Meccorre's high-res contrasts were disorientating.

The Tesla Quartet (US) followed with Debussy's String Quartet, the fleeting atmospheres of which have defeated some of the world's finest. This was a subtly coloured performance that balanced confidently between intimacy and extraversion. A real sense of four players listening to each other did not obstruct a natural rapport with the audience.

Dark and stormy or light and lyrical, the fevered idiom of Mendelssohn's Second Quartet suited the Arcadia Quartet (Romania), who got a lovely "dancing to keep from crying" energy in the third movement.

Confusingly, the judges' decision took account of performances in earlier rounds. Based on the final alone, I would have given the prize to the Tesla, whom the jury placed third. First prize went to the Arcadia. All three quartets deserve a bright future.

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