

# the guardian

## Carducci Quartet

Wigmore Hall, London

Andrew Clements, Wednesday 20 January 2010

Four years ago, the Carducci Quartet made a deep impression playing Dutilleux and Kurtág in the annual Park Lane Group young artists series. Since then, with residencies in Cork, Cardiff and at Trinity College of Music, their progress has been rapid, and their Wigmore recital suggested that the group is now very much the finished article – among the finest of the current exceptional crop of young British-based string quartets.

The polish of the Carducci's playing was obvious in Haydn's E flat Quartet, Op 33 No 2, "The Joke" – the finely calibrated weight of tone, unselfconscious stylishness and a deliciously deadpan delivery of the false endings in the finale that give the work its nickname. But it was the performances of a far more hefty pair of works that really showed their maturity.

Like all the chamber music Elgar composed in the last years of the first world war, the character of the Piano Quintet, with its hints of Spanish rhythms, occasional outbreaks of palm-court sentimentality and sinister moments of dread, is hard to pin down. But with pianist Charles Owen, the Carducci judged it perfectly, just as they tackled César Franck's only quartet with massive assurance.

The Franck is a formidable work and – at more than 50 minutes – probably performed less often than it deserves. But, as the Carducci showed, it is one of the great monuments of late 19th-century chamber music. If there were occasional moments in their performance when its sheer expressive power seemed to require greater weight of tone than the Carducci could muster, then perhaps only a whole string orchestra could do justice to some of Franck's climaxes. The way they navigated such a lucid course through the vast, rambling structure, though, was totally convincing.