

Irish Examiner

March 2007

By Declan Townsend

The spontaneous gasps of pleasure from the audience, that greeted the final notes of Dvorak's "American" quartet, Op. 96 in F, in the magnificently restored Drawing Room of Fota House, were well deserved. This was a superb performance, as fine as one could wish to hear. Music lovers in Dublin and Wexford, Bray and Birr would be well advised not to miss this first-class quartet on this, their first Irish tour.

The quartet (two husband-and-wife couples, one English, one Irish) has an open-air freshness about the sound and they play with what feels like abandon. There is, in fact, nothing left to chance. Although every detail is carefully thought out and beautifully balanced, it feels as if everything is spontaneous, with the result that the players' enjoyment of what they are about communicates itself to the audience in a most endearing fashion. Haydn's "Frog" quartet, Op 50 No 6 in D, needs, and got, spectacularly virtuosic playing from both Matthew (violin) and Emma (cello) Denton, while the inner voices of Michelle Fleming (violin) and Eoin Schmidt-Martin (viola) balanced and supported them perfectly. The Ravel was rhythmically free, atmospheric, mysterious, brilliantly balanced and kaleidoscopically colourful, while the Dvorak was Romantic (in every sense), passionate and wonderfully exciting. Their ability to caress every last detail and still convey spontaneity was quite staggering.