Opus13



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Opus13

2026-2027 Biography
Sonoko Miriam Welde, violin; Edvard Erdal, violin
Albin Uusijärvi, viola; Daniel Thorell, cello

First Prize winners at both the 2025 Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition and the Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition, Opus13 is rapidly building a reputation on the international chamber music scene.

Named after Mendelssohn's youthful and passionate A Minor Quartet, Op. 13 - the first piece they ever played together - the quartet was formed in Oslo in 2014 by four teenagers eager to dive into the world of string quartets. Opus13 comprises Norwegian violinists Sonoko Miriam Welde and Edvard Erdal, violist Albin Uusijärvi and cellist Daniel Thorell, both from Sweden.

In addition to performing the core string quartet repertoire by composers such as Mozart, Bartók, and Schubert, Opus13 are passionate ambassadors of Nordic classical and contemporary music, frequently programming works by Grieg, Stenhammar, Tarrodi, Byström, and Fagerlund. They also enjoy genre-crossing collaborations, having performed with Norwegian folk and popular music artists including Gjermund Larsen Trio, Sissel Kyrkjebø, and Sver.

Upcoming debuts include performances at Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall London, Laeiszhalle Hamburg, Essen Philharmonie, Rotterdam De Doelen and Stockholm Konserthus. They present a three-season concert residency at Leeds International Chamber Series as well as festival projects at the Baltic Sea, Bergen, Bologna, Cheltenham and Banff Festivals. Opus13 return to South Korea for a series of performances and make their debut tour of Japan including performances in Osaka, Yokohama and Tokyo.

Opus13 collaborates with leading musicians such as Janine Jansen, Leif-Ove Andsnes, Tabea Zimmermann and Anne Sofie von Otter. Their musical development has been shaped by ongoing mentorships with Bjørg Lewis and Berit Cardas of the Vertavo Quartet and Tim Frederiksen. From 2025 the quartet has also studied with Prof. Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartett).

Opus13 are the founders and artistic directors of Vinterspill på Lillehammer, an annual chamber music festival in Lillehammer, Norway. They received the Borletti-Buitoni Award in spring 2026.

The quartet performs on an exceptional set of instruments:
- Sonoko Miriam Welde, violin – Antonio Stradivari (1736), on loan from Anders Sveaas' Charitable Fund
- Edvard Erdal, violin – Giovanni Battista Guadagnini (1751), on loan from Dextra Musica
- Albin Uusijärvi, viola – Christophe Landon (2008)

- Daniel Thorell, cello – Giuseppe & Antonio Gagliano (1772), on loan from the Järnåker Foundation

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MARCH 2026 - PLEASE DESTROY ALL PREVIOUSLY DATED MATERIALS.

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Opus13

Critical Acclaim



"This was a performance of a profundity and kaleidoscopic colour that would have been astounding from any ensemble, let alone a young one still making itself known."

Gramophone

"This audience, however, was so enthralled that there was hardly a squeak or a throat-clear during any of the moments of silence. It was as if everybody sat motionless until the riotous response at the end."

Oregon Artswatch

"By far the biggest discovery of the festival this year, for me, was Swedish Norwegian string quartet Opus13, whose several concerts made a first impression that I will not forget in a hurry."

Seen and Heard International

"I hope they will become a regular engagement, as they are pretty special. I am decidedly a fan."

Edinburgh Review

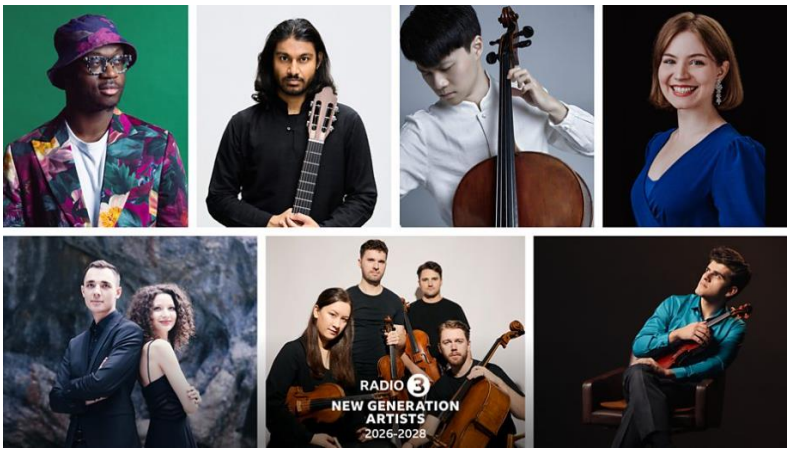
Features

Opus13

BBC

April 2, 2026

BBC Radio 3 announces 2026-2028 cohort of New Generation Artists



BBC Radio 3 has revealed the names of the New Generation Artists (NGAs) joining the station's prestigious talent development scheme in September 2026 through to December 2028. They are: Brazilian violinist Guido Sant'Anna, Scottish-Indian guitarist Samrat Majumder, Austrian mezzo-soprano Anja Mittermüller, Norwegian Swedish string quartet Opus13 (violinists Sonoko Miriam Welde and Edvard Erdal, violist Albin Uusijärvi and cellist Daniel Thorell), Chinese cellist Yibai Chen, Austrian Gugg Piano Duo (Tereza Gugg-Kalabova and Johannes Gugg) and British jazz pianist Sultan Stevenson.

These performers join the NGAs who have been on the scheme since 2025, and remain on it until December 2027: the UK-based Astatine Trio (pianist Berniya Hamie, violinist Maja Horvat and cellist Riya Hamie), Russian-American soprano Erika Baikoff, British baritone Andrew Hamilton, the NOVO Quartet from Denmark (violinists Kaya Kato Møller and Nikolai Vasili Nedergaard, violist Daniel Śledziński and cellist Signe Ebstrup Bitsch), Ukrainian clarinettist Oleg Shebeta-Dragan and Austrian pianist Lukas Sternath.

Founded in 1999 to support outstanding young instrumentalists, singers and ensembles at the beginning of their international careers, the BBC New Generation Artists scheme has helped launch the careers of more than 150 musicians, many of whom have gone on to become leading figures in classical music and jazz.

The scheme offers its artists exceptional opportunities to perform at major UK venues and festivals, and to appear regularly with the BBC orchestras. Their performances and recordings are broadcast on BBC Radio 3, reaching audiences across the UK and throughout Europe via the European Broadcasting Union.

Emma Bloxham, BBC Radio 3 Commissioning Editor, Live Music says: "It's always a great moment announcing our new cohort of New Generation Artists; they're without exception young musicians at the very top of their game, and it's an enormous privilege to be playing such an important role in supporting them and nurturing their talents in the coming years. Radio 3 listeners are in for a treat!"

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Opus13

the Strad

September 17, 2026

Explorations of identity: what does the music of Mendelssohn and Grieg mean to Opus13?



The Norwegian-Swedish string quartet Opus13 has garnered plenty of success over the last two years. 2025 was marked with victories at both the **Wigmore Hall** and **Bordeaux** international string quartet competitions. The following year, the ensemble was named **BBC New Generation Artists for 2026–28** and received both the prestigious **Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award** and Sweden's Sixten Gemzéus Music Award.

It's no doubt that competition triumphs and accolades are part of the group's springboard to success. Opus13, comprising Norwegian violinists Sonoko Miriam Welde and Edvard Erdal, Swedish violist Albin Uusijärvi and cellist Daniel Thorell, will perform at prestigious venues and festivals, as well as release its debut album of Mendelssohn and Grieg string quartets on Alpha Classics on 18 September 2026.

The quartet members spoke with *The Strad* about its recent success and upcoming highlights, as well as the significance of the repertoire on its debut recording.

As winners of numerous competitions, awards and accolades, you are no doubt now very busy as an ensemble. What have been some highlights of your career together as Opus13 so far, and what are some engagements you are looking forward to?

Albin Uusijärvi: We just had a very busy and fun summer with concert tours in Japan, Korea and Canada. One other really important moment for us was recording our first album, which we are very excited about!

We have a lot of exciting debuts coming up, including Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Wigmore Hall in London, Laeiszhalle in Hamburg, the quartet series in Oslo and Stockholm and many more.

Tell us about the significance of the repertoire chosen for your debut album. You've recorded Mendelssohn's String Quartet in A minor, op.13, as well as Grieg's String Quartet no.1 op.27 and a transcription of *Solveig's Song*.

Sonoko Miriam Welde: I think 'identity' is a key word here. Both of these pieces are strongly connected to who we are as a quartet, and I think in their own ways they are also explorations of identity.

Mendelssohn's A Minor Quartet, op.13, was the first piece we learnt when we formed Opus13 twelve years ago and it was the inspiration for our name. Mendelssohn was 18 years old when he

wrote it – a young artist coming into his own, clearly influenced by Beethoven's legacy and his 16 string quartets, but also incredibly eager to pave his own way and develop his own ideas. Looking back, I think it was a perfect first piece for us. We were all around 18 years old ourselves, idealistic and excited to dive into the great world of string quartets.

The Grieg string quartet was written at a time in Norwegian history when the country was searching for its own national identity, after more than 300 years under Danish rule. The artists of that time were asking the question, 'What does Norway sound like?' And for us, 150 years later, this is what Norway sounds like. As Norwegians and Swedes, we feel very connected to this piece, with its folk-music and dance-inspired character, as well as the images of nature it evokes.

What does Opus13 bring to the interpretations of the Mendelssohn and Grieg quartets that is unique, and how have your interpretations of these works evolved throughout the years?

Daniel Thorell: It's of course very difficult to describe, ourselves, what we bring to the interpretation of these quartets but I'd like to think that with a piece like Felix Mendelssohn's second string quartet, it's become like a sort of tapestry of ideas and musical memories we've had throughout the years.

Since, as Sonoko mentioned, it was the first piece the quartet ever played together, it has also followed and evolved with us. Tempos have changed, colours have shifted and bowings have been rewritten many times.

Sometimes there's been musical ideas that we get back to a few years down the line, questioning what we were thinking and at other times, some 'forgotten' ideas might be a wonderful rediscovery. I think that what we've ended up with for this recording is a sort of culmination of every time we've played this piece.

As for the Grieg, it's a piece that's very close to our hearts and that has also been a part of our quartet journey for a long time. It's music that feels like an encapsulation of Norwegian nature and folklore, which makes it feel easily relatable for us and I think this affects the way we play it. I hope our interpretation on this recording comes across as a story containing all the fjords, mountains, trolls and forests that can be found in Grieg's music.

Edvard Erdal: I find it difficult to put into words what makes our interpretations of these two pieces unique. Both works have been so important to us, and have naturally evolved throughout our musical journey. Hopefully, they will continue to do so for decades to come. But this recording will forever remain a time capsule of this very important stage in our career and musical lives.

Opus13

GRAMOPHONE

April 8, 2025

Opus13 wins 16th Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition



Swedish Norwegian string quartet Opus 13 have been awarded First Prize at the 16th Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition. The quartet also took home five of the Competition's specialist prizes.

Founded in 2014 at the Barratt Due Institute of Music in Oslo, Opus13 is comprised of violinists Sonoko Miriam Welde and Edvard Erdal, violist Albin Uusijärvi and cellist Daniel Thorell. Opus13's First Prize includes a £10,000 cash award, alongside an extensive package of performance opportunities, including a Wigmore Hall recital and UK tour, residencies in the United States and Canada, and an invitation to perform at the fifth String Quartet Biennale Amsterdam in 2026.

The Final, held at Wigmore Hall on 6 April 2025, saw three finalist quartets perform complete Beethoven String Quartets in front of a public audience and an international jury comprising members of five leading string quartets. The jury was chaired by Wigmore Hall's Artistic and Executive Director, John Gilhooly. The Second Prize (£6,000) was awarded to the Terra String Quartet and Third Prize (£3,000) to Quartet Integra.

John Gilhooly, Wigmore Hall Director and Chairman of the jury said: 'This competition remains a vital platform for the most promising young string quartets worldwide. We were delighted to award First Prize to Opus13, whose performance in the Final was both technically superb and emotionally compelling. Congratulations to our winners and to all the quartets taking part, whose performances over the past week have been superb.'

The 2025 Competition ran from 1-6 April, with four days of preliminary rounds held at the Royal Academy of Music's Duke's Hall, followed by the semi-finals and final at Wigmore Hall. Each round was live-streamed free of charge by Wigmore Hall on its website, and they remain available to watch at **here**.

Opus13

THE VIOLIN CHANNEL
World's Leading Classical Music Platform

May 24, 2025

Opus13 String Quartet Wins Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition



Open to string quartets of every nationality, the **Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition** came to a close today in Bordeaux, France. **The entire competition is now available to watch on The Violin Channel.**

The First Grand Prize went to the **Opus13 String Quartet**. They will receive €20,000, a set of bows by Edwin Clement, Meilleur Ouvrier de France (valued at €40,000), a recording project for an album produced by Mirare and distributed by Pias/Harmonia Mundi, and an upcoming concert tour.

The **Terra String Quartet** received Second Prize, consisting of €10,000, four instrument cases donated by BAM Cases. They also received the ProQuartet Prize, which came with an invitation to a series of masterclasses to be chosen by the prizewinner (including teaching, accommodation, and transport costs), and a concert in the ProQuartet season.

Third Prize went to the **Arete Quartet**, who will receive €5,000 and an invitation for the quartet to the Saint-Jean de Lux/Ciboure Ravel Academy (including teaching and accommodation costs).

The additional prizes were as follows:

- Contemporary Work Prize, €2,000: **Opus13 String Quartet**
- Young Listeners' Prize (not awarded by the jury), €1,000: **Opus13 String Quartet**
- Audience Prize (awarded by the audience at the final): **Opus13 String Quartet**

Created in 1999, the **Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition** is organized every three years by the **Quatuors à Bordeaux** association, which also organizes the **"Vibre!" festival**. Since 2021, it has been co-directed by the **Quatuor Modigliani** (artistic director) and **Julien Kieffer** (director).

The 2025 winners of the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, Swedish-Norwegian string quartet **Opus13** comprises Norwegian violinists Sonoko Miriam Welde and Edvard Erdal, violist Albin Uusijärvi, and cellist Daniel Thorell, both from Sweden. They first garnered international attention when they were awarded Second Prize at the Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2022, and the following year, they received Norway's prestigious Equinor Classical Music Award.

Founders and artistic directors of Vinterspill på Lillehammer, an annual chamber music festival in Norway's Olympic town of Lillehammer, they receive guidance and coaching from Bjørg Lewis and Berit Cardas of the Vertavo Quartet, as well as from Tim Frederiksen.

They have performed at concert series and festivals such as the International Chamber Music Festival Utrecht in the Netherlands, Chamber Music Northwest in Oregon, East Neuk Festival in Scotland, Yeulmaru and Yonsei Chamber Music Festivals in South Korea, Rusk Festival in Finland, and most of the major chamber music festivals in Norway, including the Bergen International Festival, and the Stavanger, Rosendal, Trondheim, and Risør Chamber Music Festivals.

Reviews

Opus13

GRAMOPHONE

Awards 2026

MENDELSSOHN; GRIEG String Quartets

By Charlotte Gardner



Those with an eye on the young artist and international competition scene may remember 2025 as being a year in which the string quartet world saw lightning strike twice. Opus13 – Norwegian violinists Sonoko Miriam Welde and Edvard Erdal and Swedes Albin Uusijärvi on viola and cellist Daniel Thorell – won both the Bordeaux International and Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competitions just weeks apart, repeating the feat of the Leonkoro Quartet in 2022. They then followed the Leonkoro's path once more, being quickly snapped up as BBC New Generation Artists and awarded a Borletti-Buitoni career grant. As to whether all this merited the attention also of the music-loving public at large, writing here as a critic who attended the 2025 Bordeaux competition myself, I can't answer strongly enough in the affirmative. I've often since wistfully replayed in my head their Schubert *Death and the Maiden* in particular, its combination of technical and architectural finesse, imagination and soul floored me so. Also mention-worthy is that Welde's playing was already known to me, thanks to having reviewed in these pages her debut concerto album with the Oslo Philharmonic (LAWO, 1/22) – assured, authentic interpretations of Bruch, Barber and Vaughan Williams that had me thinking that here was a new soloist on the block. Time, though, has shown that it is in fact a new quartet on the block, and the wisdom of Welde's decision is further confirmed by this, its recording debut.

Mendelssohn's fragilely, passionately questioning String Quartet No 2 in A minor, written aged 18 in the wake of his idol Beethoven's 1827 death, is the first piece Opus13 ever played – in Oslo in 2014 when its players were equally teenagers – and after which it is named. Their take on it is a magically vulnerable, human one striking a tremendously dramatically potent balance between tight-knitted ensemble thought and solo personality, and employing a fantastically wide palette of articulation and colouring. Lock your ears in the first movement on to all their individual shades of inflection (try from around 2'00"). Enjoy their *Adagio non lento*'s long narrative arc; the silky organicism with which they work the many transitions between moods, tempos and textures. The Intermezzo's fluttering delicacy comes with a grippingly tense undercurrent. They've dug so deep, so searchingly intimately into Mendelssohn's score, and it all sings so true.

Showcasing their Nordic DNA, the Grieg quartet equally abounds in supremely measured and multi-shaded interplays, with some thrilling superglued-ensemble wildness; and again, that fantastic balance between solo and ensemble personality. Listen to the febrile drama of Welde's vibrato from around 1'15" in the first movement.

For 'Solveig's Song', think earthy, airy play between dusk and luminosity, solidity and haze, and quiet suspension of time against folkily inflected rhythmic lilt; a narrative in tonal and emotional colour so absorbing that, despite its brevity, you emerge slightly dazed.

We've seen a number of very exciting quartets launched over the past few years, but the sheer humanity and storytelling across this debut recording underlines that Opus13 is, at least to my own ears, particularly special.

Opus13

the Strad

October 16, 2026

The Strad Recommends: Opus13: Grieg, Mendelssohn

By David Thrasher



Mendelssohn's A minor String Quartet is the clear choice for your first recording if you've called your group Opus13. And these players demonstrate their solid collective identification with the work in a debut notable for the accomplishment and confidence with which they approach it. It's the first piece Opus13 played together, having formed in Oslo in 2014, since when the group has built a firm reputation, crowned earlier this year with a Borletti–Buitoni Award and being named as BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists.

Grieg's G minor String Quartet is an apposite coupling, given the group consists of two Norwegian players and two Swedes. Grieg studied in Leipzig, where the ghosts of Mendelssohn and Schumann must have hovered almost palpably, but he eschews their post-Beethovenian outlook in favour of something more personal, more distinctly Nordic.

Opus13 collaborates with folk players as well as classical musicians, and the group brings delicious Scandi inflections to the G minor's more outdoorsy moments. The unanimity of purpose at the opening of the Grieg is matched by the drama of the recitative at the start of the Mendelssohn's finale, and by the clarity and coordination of the Allegro vivace's skittering passagework. A debut to be proud of, and a tantalising taste of what this quartet might achieve in all the other opus numbers the repertoire has to offer.

Opus13

The Guardian

September 17, 2026

Opus13: Mendelssohn and Grieg album review – an assured and distinctive debut Opus13

By Erica Jeal



You would expect good things from Opus13 – current BBC New Generation Artists, and winners at last year's Wigmore Hall and Bordeaux string quartet competitions – and this assured, distinctive debut lives up to that. The quartet formed in Oslo in 2014 as teenagers, naming themselves after the first piece they played together, and it's with that work, Mendelssohn's Op 13 No 2, that they lead off. The brief, soulful introduction breaks into a tense, runaway allegro in which the occasional violin swoop only increases the feeling of urgency. Mendelssohn's debt to Beethoven in this work is clear, and the quartet play the slow movement with an intense warmth that makes it seem to belong beside that composer's great adagios.

The Mendelssohn is nicely paired with Grieg's Quartet No 1, a work full of insistent repetition beautifully handled here so as to create momentum rather than sap it. The folksy style hinted at in the second movement blossoms in the third, which gets a touch of Nordic fiddle, exuberant yet elegant. As encore there's more Grieg, a characterful version of Solveig's Song. The arrangement is credited not to a single person but to the entire group equally – which comes as no surprise at all.

Opus13

the Strad

September 11, 2026

Festival review: East Neuk Festival 2026

By Simon Thompson



…This year saw the return of **Opus13,** the stellar Swedish–Norwegian quartet which made its UK debut at the East Neuk Festival in 2024 (and then proceeded to win Wigmore Hall's String Quartet Competition last year). In Kilrenny the musicians chose the quartet from which they derive their name – Mendelssohn's Second, which was the first work they played together as teenagers. It's clearly a piece close to their hearts: they lavished warmth on the slow music, savouring the Adagio like a fine wine, while the fast outer movements crackled with energy, sparks flying in both the lively first movement and the finale.

Opus13



September 21, 2026

Mendelssohn String Quartet No. 2 / Opus13

By Jon Jacob



The Norwegian-Swedish quartet Opus13, which took first prize at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition in 2025, have released their first album, making the work that inspired the ensemble's name the first work on the release. Mendelssohn's String Quartet No. 2, Opus 13 has a characteristically raw, urgent sound in this recording, one that captures the same distinctive sound discernible in their live performance (*Cheltenham 2026, Thoroughly Good*). Listen out for the crystal-clear upper register in first violinist Sonoko Miriam Welde's tightly spun, sweet melodic lines in the opening movement. The second movement adagio possesses a heady concoction of teenage aspiration and trepidation. In the impish third movement intermezzo the finest of viola pedal notes is a deliciously sardonic musical hinge that tickles the senses every time it makes an appearance. The concluding presto maintains a solid approach throughout, still managing to cascade and career with youthful confidence and just a hint of operatic melodrama.

Opus13's recording makes Grieg's First Quartet sound a good deal less comfortable than the Piano Concerto or Peer Gynt would lead you to expect. Written in 1877–78, when the composer and his wife Nina were experiencing a crisis in their marriage, it covers a lot of emotional ground. Opus13 is a robust and thrilling match for the demands of the work, switching between tumult, tempestuous, and tender expression in a way that powers this performance with energy. Opus13's razor-sharp playing underlines the edgier image Grieg is afforded by this work. The focused articulation in the final presto is another of Opus13's calling cards: the smallest, often quietest, material working hard to expand a work for four instruments into something on a much larger scale.

Opus13

THE TIMES

July 6, 2026

East Neuk Festival review — chamber music magic for a five-star birthday

By By Simon Thompson

...However, the best of Saturday was saved to last with a scorching performance of the third Razumovsky quartet by Opus13 in Crail. This young Scandinavian quartet made their UK debut at the 2024 festival and they have gone from strength to strength since. Hearing the airborne freedom with which they phrased Beethoven's melodies, the searing commitment of their playing and their breathtaking virtuosity in the hell-for-leather finale, you can see why.

Seen and Heard International
SINCE 1999 A LIVE REVIEW SITE FOR OPERA, BALLET, CONCERTS, THEATRE , BROADCASTS AND FILMS

July 1, 2024

Opus13 prove to be the big discovery of the East Neuk Festival 2024

By Simon Thompson



Every year the East Neuk Festival manages, slightly implausibly, to bring some of the biggest hitters in chamber music to a sleepy corner of East Fife that is tucked away from the rest of the world. But the festival also showcases newcomers, and one of the great skills of the festival's director, Svend McEwan-Brown, is to spot rising stars on the way up and give them a platform. Hence on the Friday evening of this year's festival, the East Neuk's audiences could hear chamber music royalty and regular festival guests, the Pavel Haas Quartet and pianist Boris Giltburg playing a predictably brilliant programme of Brahms and Tchaikovsky.

However, by far the biggest discovery of the festival this year, for me, was Swedish Norwegian string quartet Opus13, whose several concerts made a first impression that I will not forget in a hurry. For one thing, they played with sensationally rich tone, supported by the acoustic of the little church in Kilrenny which hosted their first concert, and which might as well have been designed to support a string quartet. The main work in that programme was Beethoven's mighty B-flat Op.130 Quartet, ending with the *Grosse Fuge*, and Beethoven's quietly introspective opening lent itself beautifully to Opus13's richly focused sound. The players leaned into one another in a way that milked every drop of beauty from those opening phrases, laying the groundwork for a Cavatina of honeyed warmth and calmly flowing spiritual intensity.

What was really striking about their playing of it, though, was how playful so much of the music sounded. This quartet contains so many mysteries and questions whether it is as good a way of answering them as any, and the main *Allegro* of the first movement seemed to dance along rather than announce itself from the mountain top. All of the middle movements had a twinkle and a sparkle to them, the slow third movement just as much as the spidery second movement and the heel-kicking German dance. In fact, if you hadn't been told, then you would scarcely have realised you were listening to one of the great, granite masterpieces of western music.

Until you got to the last movement, of course. Stravinsky famously described the *Grosse Fuge* as 'eternally contemporary', but I sometimes think 'eternally baffling' might have been a better quip. In fairness to these young musicians, they refused to let themselves be intimidated by it. Instead, they tore with abandon into the opening unisons, and their bows dug into the lines of the fugue in a way that gave the music real teeth. The muscular vigour of their playing always seemed to have another stop to pull out, but there were

flashes of sweetness too and even, if you knew how to listen for it, some of that earlier playfulness.

There wasn't so much playfulness to their companion piece, but Caroline Shaw's tremulously beautiful *Entr'acte* didn't need it. Instead, it seemed to have a deep spiritual sense that almost shuddered as it was played. Shaw does a lot with a little, creating tonally appealing music out of just a few fragments, not unlike the holy minimalism you would associate with Arvo Pärt, but reimagined for the digital age. So cleverly did Opus13 shape the sound that you could have been tricked into thinking that it had been electronically manipulated, even though it definitely wasn't: the way the lines of the central section melted messily into the return of the opening was proof enough of that.

On Saturday evening Opus13 performed Grieg's completed quartet with livewire energy that seemed to shoot a bolt of lightning through it. The mood of tempestuous energy characterised even the dark-hued central movements, and didn't really lift, even through the final *Saltarello*. Yet every so often they could make the clouds part, most notably in a sensationally lovely effect at the end of the first movement when Daniel Thorell's cello sang out the most gorgeous lyrical melody while the other instruments played a quietly shuddering tremolo. Throughout, each aching suspension, every lingering harmony was invested with incredible meaning and the feeling that the quartet's textures were being illuminated rather than merely driven.

And on Sunday morning they did a terrific job with Andrea Tarrodi's *Madárdal*, a piece which, like Shaw's *Entr'acte* was built out of twittering shards of melody repeated, layered, contrasted and melded. The second half of the quartet unfolded its slow-moving music like tendrils of sound through the still air of Elie Church, sounding completely hypnotic. Opus13 were later joined by clarinettist Julian Biss in a beautifully upbeat performance of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet. The quartet provided gentle support for Biss as he gently spun out the gorgeous long lines of the slow movement, while the second Trio of the *Menuet* had all the swing of a bucolic Ländler. Each player had their chance to shine individually in the jolly variations of the finale, and everyone looked like they were having a whale of a time. Sounded like it, too.

If Opus13 were my big discovery of the festival then the Scottish Chamber Orchestra provided more predictable treats. They are the East Neuk Festival's strongest thread of continuity, appearing in every one of the festival's twenty years, and their programme of Mozart and Beethoven packed out the Bowhouse, a big warehouse that serves as a farmer's market on the main coastal road. It just about works as a concert hall, though it gives the music an unusually specific sense of location. You never feel that the sound is anywhere other than at the front of the hall: there is no bloom or any sense that the acoustic is carrying the sound to your ear. There is nothing necessarily wrong with that, though, and it does have the big advantage of clarity, something that reaped dividends in their take on Beethoven's Symphony No.7, which really let the natural brass and timps let rip.

That is something that conductor Maxim Emelyanychev loves to do, and there are normally unexpected treats in store when he acts as a concerto soloist, too. Those came through in Mozart's celebratory PIano Concerto No.22, particularly in the cadenzas, which had a strong feel of being made up on the spot. If that brought excitement to the outer movements then it didn't bring so many advantages to the slow movement, one of Mozart's most poignantly heartfelt utterances, which here felt like it was being pulled in several directions at once. Fluctuations in tempi and even some slightly ragged coordination between keyboard and orchestra meant that Mozart's gorgeous sense of meditation was interrupted by some clever-clever interpretative touches, which might have worked in the faster movements, but not so much here. Still, the upbeat jollity of the finale swept all before it, and Emelyanychev even managed to give it space to breathe in its slow *Menuet*-like interlude.

Opus13

Edinburgh Music Review

July 7, 2026

East Neuk Festival: Opus13 Play Op. 13

By Donal Hurley

The first outing for one of the three string quartet ensembles appearing at this year's East Neuk Festival was on the evening of 2nd July in Kilrenny Church, given by Swedish-Norwegian string quartet Opus13. The catchy tagline Opus13 Play Op.13' referred to Mendelssohn's amazingly mature and profound Beethoven-influenced A-minor quartet, often rather randomly assigned 'No.2', written in 1827 when he was 18 years old, following Beethoven's death. It was the second half of the concert. The group is named for the piece, it being the first they played together. Mozart's D-minor Quartet No.15 K421, the second (1783?) of the set of six dedicated to Haydn, opened the concert. Before the interval was a recent work by Swedish composer Britta Byström, 'Images from the Floating World', 6 short movements inspired by *ukiyo-e*, Japanese woodblock prints.

I know first-hand what a joy Mozart's 'Haydn' Quartets are to play, usually (but not exclusively) from the 2nd violinist's chair, though I'll shrink from revealing how many decades ago that was, The D-minor is probably the one I played least, apart possibly from its 3rd movement, which is a cracking encore piece. Opus13 set about showing why it deserves the same love as the other 5 'children' (as Mozart referred to the 6 quartets in his dedication to Haydn). From the start, gorgeous mutually responsive phrasing breathed the quirky ebb and flow of the music, while the sunny F-major second theme smiled warmly, the exposition repeat allowing us to savour it again. The brief but ingeniously fugal development was characterful, before D-minor was reasserted by the end of the recapitulation and for the brief stern *coda*. Genial F-major opened and closed the *Andante*'s narrative-like phrasing, the dramatic minor key exploration in the central interlude making a super contrast and inviting each listener to make up their own story-line. The minuet's grim *sturm-und-drang* counterpoint sounded as if it was going to be canonical (it isn't). The contrasting D-major sweetness of the gossamer-light, soaring flight of fancy for first violin in the *Trio* was exquisite, not least because of the flawless intonation from leader Sonoko Miriam Welde and her Stradivari instrument. A lovely teasing *tenuto* before the last phrase of the *Trio* drew a smile, and then of course the minuet stylishly reaffirmed its tale of woe. Super. It was a decade and a half later, and half that time after Mozart's death, that Haydn penned his Op.76 No.2 Quartet (the "Fifths"), also in D minor. Its "Witches' Minuet - *Hexenminuett*" and D-major trio remind me of the Mozart and make me wonder whether the older composer was looking back with a mixture of affection and sadness at his young friend gone too soon. The finale's theme-and-variations is based on a jaunty folksong-like melody, each narrative phrase responded to by "oh my gosh, surely not, did you real-ly?", its charm fully realised. The variations include an ornate melisma for first violin, some equestrian jumping with displaced accents, a singing duel between the viola and first violin as two exotic birds, a D-major idyll, and a final quicker D-minor trot to the finish line, with rueful chromaticism and a cheeky *Tierce de Picardie* at the end. Scrumptious.

Cellist Daniel Thorell spoke of how glad the quartet were to be back in the East Neuk, as he introduced the Byström. Expecting some sonic picture-painting, I confess that the

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first of the 6 images, marked '*Con moto'* had me thinking "oh no, not another 5 of these", as it was all shrieks and howls. But, in fact and thankfully, it was an atypical 'outlier' and the other images were significantly more listener-friendly. In '*Ritmico*', ornamented figures commented over *pizzicato ostinati*, culminating in harmonious ebb-and-flow with the texture thinning and broadening by turn. '*Leggiero*' involved a strolling rhythm overlaid with flicking figures, subsiding to warm chording with birdsong in the first violin. '*Grazioso*' was gorgeous: dreamy harmonics drifting in harmonious chords ornamented by delicate figures. '*Energico*' had fragments of jig rhythms morphing to something squarer, harmonics singing elegantly again at the end. The final image, worryingly bringing back the marking '*Con moto*', was in fact a delight, with pleasing textures and an oriental feel. Well worth seeking out another hearing, possibly skipping the first movement.

But we were there for the Mendelssohn, and it was worth waiting for. The song-like tenderness of the A-major *Adagio* introduction benefitted from rich, warm ensemble tone, while stormy passionate romanticism was dramatically unleashed in the ensuing *Allegro vivace*. Chamber conversations, especially between first violin and cello, were particularly well highlighted. The slow movement begins with a reference to the opening song of the first movement. A desolate viola melody from Albin Uusijärvi became a slow melancholy fugue (very like that in the slow movement of Beethoven's Op.95), desperately sad, leading to a more turbulent section which built to an agitated climax, from which the first violin's sobs climbed down. Quiet consolatory chording offered solace and re-established the calm of the opening. When the viola returned with the theme that had become fugal, it was enveloped in the warm embrace of chording from the others, ending the movement calmly. The third movement, rather than a dance in 3, opens with a slow light-textured and rather satirical march. Even more light-textured, the scampering, dizzy middle section scurries about recklessly. The march is reprised, as is a fragment of the scurrying, before the *finale* launches *attacca* and dramatically with scary tremolo and a disapproving recitative from the first violin. The *finale* proper has a striding pace that seems confident but is repeatedly challenged. Numerous possible endings appear but are overshot, including the recitative again. So far so Beethoven. But instead it is the original A-major lyricism that gets to end the quartet calmly as it had begun.

Over the years, I have heard Mendelssohn's A-minor Quartet live many times, including with such quartets as the old Takács Quartet, the old Juilliard and more recently the Edinburgh Quartet. In terms of combining cogent musical argument with expressive passion, Opus13 could give them all a run for their money. Excellent.

Opus13

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Opus 13 at the East Neuk Festival

By Donal Hurley

The Swedish-Norwegian string quartet Opus 13 featured in no fewer than four recitals over the course of this year's East Neuk Festival, two as the sole performers and a further two with illustrious guests. This article covers all four concerts, including the performances by the guests.

Their first recital as sole performers was in Kilrenny Church on the afternoon of 28th June, in a programme that presented Caroline Shaw's short single-movement 2011 2nd Quartet, '*Entra'cte*', followed by Beethoven's monumental 1825 Op.130 with the original '*Grosse Fuge*' finale, later published separately as Op.133. The audience for this first recital was disappointingly and inexplicably sparse – a treat therefore regrettably missed by many Festival regulars. It is perhaps a sign of the times that it is becoming worthy of mention that the players played from sheet music (rather than tablets).

Inspired by the key transition between the minuet and trio of Haydn's Op.77 No.2 'Lobkowitz' Quartet, Caroline Shaw's '*Entra'cte*' explores the musical shadows that hover around moments of harmonic ambiguity and indecision. Rhythm and timbre too dissolve and recrystallise in this piece, with the form and metre of a minuet occasionally asserting themselves, sonic effects like *sotto voce* bowing, harmonics, conventional and left-hand *pizzicato*, string-crossing and *glissando*, and tonal ambiguity alternating with conventional harmony. In the closing bars, the first violin rises to high harmonics, while the cello plays rapidly arpeggiated chords related to those of the beginning, finishing *pianissimo* with the harmony unresolved. A fascinating piece, and it received a cogent outing with playing that was committed to its fullest realisation.

Cellist Daniel Thorell introduced the Beethoven. This was, he said, Opus 13's first time in Scotland and they were loving their time here. He mentioned that the Cavatina movement from Beethoven's Op.130 is one of the tracks on the 'Golden Record' aboard the Voyager spacecraft, taking 'The Sounds of Earth' beyond our solar system out into the cosmos, perhaps announcing (if not boasting) our presence to extra-terrestrial intelligence (if such there be).

Opus 13 clearly believe (and there is no argument from me) that Beethoven's Op.130 is most definitely something for which our planet can be proud, and they set about proving it. Tone, phrasing and dynamic balance were all superb from the first notes of the slow introduction and the *Allegro* launched with buoyant verve. A classic Beethovenian sleight-of-hand switched from B-flat to G-flat for the second theme, as if it was the most natural thing in the world - Beethoven sharing a joke with the cellist. The conspiratorial *scherzo* and its 'show jumping' *trio* continued the wry humour, the disapproving first violin interjection prompting no contrition but a reprise of the *scherzo*. The third movement was lyrical and playful, with loads of colour, the parts fitting together perfectly. The *Alla Tedesca* sang an elegant flowing song with charm and a sense of narrative, the split line near the end where the instruments finish each other's phrases utterly magical. The *Cavatina* was very moving, fragility and vulnerability laid bare, the first violinist Sonoko Miriam Welde's exquisite subtle vibrato perfectly drawing the listeners into the stillness and tenderness, tempered with regret. The episode where the first violin seems to sob was almost unbearably beautiful. And then there was the fugue.

In a review of a performance of Op.130 with the original finale by the Castalian String Quartet at last year's Edinburgh International Festival, I wrote: "*Performing Beethoven's Op.130 with the original finale is nothing new and I've heard it live at least twice before. However, it is not unproblematic. A performing tradition has grown up around the 'Grosse Fuge' as a free-standing performable entity, which it undeniably is, but there is a tendency to dig in and emphasise its uncompromising modernity (Stravinsky described it as a work which is 'always contemporary') and to suppress the tender lyricism that is also found there. The lopsided result is impressive (and, don't get me wrong, a great listen) but fairly brutish, if not violent, and, in my opinion, unsuitable as a finale to the fundamentally optimistic Op.130. I did wonder what was in store. I needn't have worried.*" Though Opus 13's reading of the fugue was quite different from that of the Castalians, I consciously echo the same words: I needn't have worried.

It is best to acknowledge that Opus 13 did indeed "*emphasise* (the) *uncompromising modernity*" and, occasionally, the melodic elements in the densest counterpoint were swamped by the 'rant', but the dramatic contrasts were vivid and compelling, with the moments of expressive lyricism cogently incorporated into the edgy musical logic, so the overall effect was of Beethoven at his most mercurial speaking directly to a rapt audience. The chamber playing was absolutely superb. Anticipating the goodies that were to come over the next two days, my appetite was well and truly whetted.

The following day, the forenoon of the 29th saw Opus 13 back in Kilrenny Church (with Radio 3's microphones and a much more satisfying attendance) for a programme of two works, Grieg's (unfinished) 2-movement Quartet in F, his 2nd, followed by Schubert's D-minor masterpiece D810, nicknamed 'Death and the Maiden', after the song whose melody is the theme for its second movement. The Grieg G-minor Op.27 Quartet (the one he finished) has been featuring a lot on Radio 3 for the last two years at least and was programmed for that evening's concert (and eagerly anticipated). The unfinished work was previously unknown to me, and it is a gem of sunniest *Gemütlichkeit*. The sound world of its sonata-form first movement, while unmistakably Grieg, is akin to that of Borodin's Second Quartet, though somewhat more dramatic. The lyrical playing was exquisite, with tone and balance as flawless as they had been in the first concert. The second movement, a *scherzo* and *trio*, was a whimsical trolls' dance with a chromatic central section, framing a folkdance *trio* evoking the sound of the Hardanger fiddle. Deliciously characterful, with dotted rhythms like the finale of the Schubert we were about to hear but conveying glee instead of menace. An engaging and heart-warming introduction to a forgotten piece, identifying for this reviewer an omission from his CD collection.

Violist Albin Uusijärvi spoke of his admiration for the "lovely church with a great acoustic and a friendly audience", saying how the quartet felt "at home here". There was a certain delicious irony in the fact that they then delivered the most heartfelt and emotionally raw performance of the Schubert quartet that is most shot through with *Unheimlichkeit*. Impotently railing against the implacable cruelty of nature, fatally compromised health and the spectre of mortality, the first movement was driven and dramatic, the life force struggling against the odds, defiant and pathetic by turns, moments breathing new hope only to be dashed. The ensemble tone in the rich chording was hugely expressive with a phenomenal dynamic range, while the balance of the richly realised counterpoint remained flawless, a coherent shared vision evident in the mutually responsive phrasing. The slow movement, with its variations on a pathos-laden theme depicting different perspectives on the notion of Death as a friend, bringing the promise of release from suffering, featured moments of achingly beautiful lyricism and acceptance, but also defiant angry denial, concluding with a hymn-like calm submission. The *scherzo*, a stormy and demonically driven *Totentanz*, gave way to the tender *trio*, with birdsong in the first violin part allowing a brief vision of a kinder nature, before we head back out into the storm, where Death calls the tune. A wry

gallows humour pervades the finale, a rondo-like *tarantella*, a grim fatalistic acceptance allied with a determination to prolong life and keep 'dancing' in the face of the inevitable. A fast but perfectly judged tempo added to the character of the movement. Schubert's best *ritornello*, a chromatic dotted-rhythm descent on the first violin, was as teasingly whimsical as I've heard, setting up perfectly for the drive to the coda, fast, furious and grimly defiant. This was a compelling and emotionally-charged reading of Schubert's masterpiece, one I shall remember for a long time.

Opus 13 were back that evening as the first number in a concert in Crail Church, the better known (and only complete) of the two Grieg quartets, the G-minor Op.27. The programme, titled 'Meetings With Great Composers III', also featured longer-term collaborators and East Neuk favourites, pianist Boris Giltburg and 3 members of the Pavel Haas Quartet.

An '*idêe fixe*' opens the Grieg Quartet No.1, a melancholy melodic fragment that recurs in different guises throughout the work. The movement proper launches as a nervous scurrying dance, fabulously dramatic with rich sonorous chording and romantic quasi-symphonic harmonies. Opus 13 really excel in this sound-world and I would love to hear them perform the Sibelius '*Voces Intimae*'. Thrilling though the big sound was, a spooky *sotto voce* episode in the middle of the movement, and the return of the ghost of the *idêe fixe* high on the cello over tremolo accompaniment near the end, were the most chillingly memorable moments. The second movement, a *Romanze*, is not really a slow movement; more a charming lilting major-key waltz, interspersed with nervous scurrying episodes. The harmonies of the waltz become increasingly sweet and achingly beautiful towards the gentle end. The following *Intermezzo* functions as a *scherzo*, a grim *mazurka* for tipsy trolls, with a more light-hearted rustic Norwegian knees-up as a *trio*, complete with whoops of gleeful merriment, before a reprise of the *scherzo*. A tortured, baleful reappearance of the *idêe fixe* opens the finale, before the episodic hectic *Allegro comodo* minor-key *tarantella* launches. A particularly memorable moment involves the return of the main theme on the viola over strumming on the other instruments. The *idêe fixe* reappears with a vengeance, but the dance snatches the baton and drives the *coda* with a final flourish in the major key. Absolutely brilliant playing with commitment and ownership.

This concert continued with Boris Giltburg playing Tchaikovsky's Dumka in C-minor, Op.59. Beginning with a slow Slavic melody, lyrical, soulful and melancholy in a typically Tchaikovskian way, repeated with a high wandering line that morphed into a romantic accompaniment, it segued into a more animated, cheerful figure, and then a sprightly festive dance. When the melody returned to 'soulful', it had lost the 'melancholy' aspect. A cadenza led to a final dance and a dignified conclusion. Not, in truth and fairness, a piece I would thirst to hear again, but it received a spirited and committed outing.

After the interval, Boris returned with three members of the Pavel Haas Quartet in a cameo appearance to perform Brahms Piano Quartet in C-minor Op.60. Not perhaps in the echelon of Brahms most celebrated and consequently familiar chamber works, but some collaborations of chamber musicians can bestow greatness on everything they touch, and Boris Giltburg with the Pavel Haas Quartet is definitely one such (and there were goodies to reveal). The first movement, to my personal taste, takes itself very seriously and is not top-drawer Brahms, despite its outward *gravitas*. Piano chords answered by strings lead to a substantive first theme, spectral and pessimistic. A more cheerful second theme in the major key has more of a spring in its step and the writing becomes more expansive with conversation between the instruments. It was the chamber music interaction between the supremely talented players, especially the eye contact and subtle gestures of mutual acknowledgement, that became the focus of my attention and the greatest source of enjoyment in the first movement. That said, there were lovely moments of tenderness in the development and the sonata form was satisfying. The movement ends in the gloom from which it arose. The *scherzo*, a scampering nefariousness, pausing to exchange a few conspiratorial words, then off again with

grim determination in pursuit of an unseen grim purpose, offered no clue to the beauty about to unfold in the *Andante*. This was a tender romance, not unlike the first theme of the slow movement of the 2nd Symphony, first played *cantabile* by cellist Peter Jarůšek, then joined in duet by his wife, violinist Veronika Jarůškova. When violist Šimon Truszka joined, with the piano adding subtle colour and pulse, the effect was spellbindingly magical. The piano's turn came too, with the pizzicato strings accompanying its song. I had assumed that the work would be not unfamiliar, but I cannot have heard it before, as that slow movement is unforgettable. A violin melody over a nervous pulse opens the finale, joined by the other strings. The second theme, calmer and chorale-like in the major key, with the letter-V figure of the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth recurring in the accompaniment, develops with different colours and voices, recurringly *sotto voce*, less subdued at the end. The first theme returns with a softer focus and the tension winds down, two bold chords concluding.
For this reviewer, an otherwise lesser Brahms work was lifted to the sublime by a surpassingly beautiful slow movement and the highest standard of chamber musicianship.
Noon on Sunday 30th, the last day of the Festival, brought a programme titled 'Opus 13 Meet Julian Bliss' to Elie Church. Virtuoso clarinettist Julian Bliss joined the quartet in a performance of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet (more accurately, Quintet for Basset Horn and Strings) as the concluding work of the programme. Before that we heard the quartet in Swedish-Hungarian composer Andrea Tarrodi's '*Madárdal*' (his 2013 Quartet No.2), followed by Julian playing Romanian composer Tiberiu Olah's brief Sonata for Solo Clarinet, composed in the mid-1960s.
The Tarrodi is a 3-movement work, the movements based in turn on Romany/Hungarian folk music fragments, two Swedish folksongs, and finally a fusion of the two cultures (a bit like Tarrodi herself). Also woven into the texture is emulation of birdsong from species associated with each nation. There was a freshness and optimism about the music that was delightful to experience, seemingly 'found' harmonies and a variety of timbral effects adding colour. One simple but hauntingly beautiful recurring feature in the second and third movements was the two violins emulating two birds calling and answering each other, Sonoko Miriam Welde and Edvard Erdal caught in a spell of avian enchantment. A super piece.
The Olah piece, inspired by a Brâncuşi sculpture 'The Majestic Bird' and written in homage to the artist, also evokes a sense of awe at the freedom of birds, but does so in musical language so akin to that of Messiaen that, had I been an eavesdropper passing Elie Church rather than a reviewer with a programme in my hand having had the piece introduced by the performer, I would have concluded that I had heard a clarinettist practicing his part from the 'Quartet for the End of Time'. Rapid agile runs with wide-ranging tonal leaps, long powerful crescendos on a single note, huge contrasts of legato and staccato, loud and soft, and static and frenetic, were enhanced by unusual timbral effects including phenomenal flutter-tonguing. Pretty amazingly virtuosic and, as a massive fan of Messiaen since my teens when I met him, very much my cup of tea. But maybe not everybody's, as acknowledged by Julian Bliss in his introductory remarks, saying, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, "Don't worry if it's a bit overwhelming – it's quite short".
He also introduced the basset horn with its longer body and extended bass range (and somewhat stunted repertoire, effectively limited to Mozart's Concerto and Quintet), before the sunniest of A-major pieces revived the Scottish summer. I am delighted to report that there was no hint of concertante playing, but only the most congenial chamber music as the first movement wove its magic. A slight relaxation of tempo on the second subject allowed the first violin's major key sigh of contentment and the clarinet's minor key response to hold the moment before they took flight together, the phrasing exquisite.
The elegantly contrapuntal development, based solely on the second phrase of the first subject, allowed all five players to shine through the idyllic texture. In the *Larghetto* slow movement, all strings but the cello were muted, Daniel Thorell achieving the same dynamic without loss of tone quality

entirely through control of bow pressure – the resulting ensemble tone was very pleasing. The *sotto voce* return of the main theme at the end was exquisite. The minuet was lyrical and charming. The first of the two trios, for strings only with a *frisson* of anxiety in the minor key, let us imagine a cloud shadow falling on our garden; but after a reprise of the minuet's elegance, the second trio restored the sunshine with more than a hint of Austrian *schmaltz*. The finale, a tripping *Allegretto* with 6 characterful variations, received commensurate characterful playing. Chamber music at its best – what the East Neuk Festival is all about.

This was Opus 13's debut at the Festival and their contribution to the range and quality of the programming was phenomenal. I hope they will become a regular engagement, as they are pretty special. I am decidedly a fan.