

The Barbirolli Quartet

Rakhi Singh – Katie Stillman – Ella Brinch – Ashok Klouda



Photography: Michael Robert Williams

The Barbirolli Quartet is known for its diverse, prolific repertoire and dynamic approach to performance. *The Times* recently described them as “forthright, full-blooded musicians, afraid of nothing” and *The Strad* hailed their “superbly realised performance” and “precision of ensemble at formidable rates of energy”.

In 2008, The Barbirolli Quartet’s achievements included winning a Tunnell Trust Award, being chosen for the Countess of Munster Musical Trust Recital Scheme and, most prestigiously, their selection by the European Concert Halls Organisation (ECHO) for inclusion in the 'Rising

Stars' series. Following their nomination by the UK members of ECHO, this tour of Europe’s leading concert halls in 2010 will take them to cities such as Paris, Amsterdam, Cologne, Barcelona, Athens, Stockholm and Salzburg, having opened Birmingham Town Hall’s own Rising Stars Series in October 2009.

Engagements in 08/09 included Wigmore Hall, St. David's Hall Cardiff, Harrogate International Festival, Edinburgh International Fringe Festival, Manchester Mid-Day in Bridgewater Hall, St James's Piccadilly and St John's, Smith Square. Following their highly successful appearance at the Cheltenham Festival in 2008, they returned in the summer of 2009 in collaboration with the Australian String Quartet, and gave a series of recitals at Lichfield, Buxton and Ryedale Festivals. They also taught and performed at the Dartington International Summer School and appeared in the ROSL Edinburgh Festival Fringe. In November 2009, the quartet travelled to New Zealand where they joined the panel of adjudicators for the Pettman/ROSL Arts International Scholarship, and toured Singapore, NZ and Australia. In May 2010 they make a further return to the Wigmore Hall, following their recent selection by the Kirkman Concert Society.

The Barbirolli Quartet collaborate with eminent pianists in an ongoing cycle of Piano Quintets, covering the major works of Dvorak, Brahms, Schumann and Elgar and they have also been joined by David Campbell and Timothy Orpen for performances of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet. The quartet has a keen interest in performing new music and in January 2008 made their Purcell Room debut as Park Lane Group Artists to critical acclaim. They regularly work in conjunction with new composers and recent premieres include 'Folk Music' by Joe Cutler and 'From listening to trees' by Emily Hall.

Formed in 2003 at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, the Barbirolli Quartet brings together a wealth of experience, its founding members each having performed widely in their native countries of Canada, Wales and Australia before coming to England to continue their studies. They are now based in London. The quartet has worked with Walter Levin and Louis Fima as part of the ProQuartet-CEMC professional training program and in 2008 was awarded Artists Fellowships at London’s Guildhall School of Music, studying primarily with The Belcea Quartet.

The Barbirolli Quartet is very grateful to the Richard Carne Trust for its generous support and also to the University of Salford, where they give regular performances in the Tuesday Midday Recitals at Peel Hall as the university's 'Quartet in Residence'.

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Rakhi Singh (violin) is based in London and performs regularly with St. Martins-in-the-Fields, Ensemble Moderne and the Fine Arts Ensemble of Wales. Over the past year she has performed the Sibelius, Prokofiev and Kurt Weill concertos with orchestras in the UK and toured Italy with the Orchestra of the Toscanini Foundation performing the Beethoven concerto. Recent projects included a collaboration with Diversions (Wales' National Dance Company) performing movements from Bach's D minor partita. She is the Winner of the Bryn Terfel Scholarship and the Prince of Wales Award 2008.

Katie Stillman (violin) was chosen for the Tillett Trust's Young Artists' Platform in 2005 and in 2006 was awarded the Maisie Lewis Award from the Worshipful Company of Musicians. She was prize-winner at the International Stepping Stones Competition the same year. Engagements have included a lunchtime recital for the Manchester Mid-day series at Bridgewater Hall, her Purcell Room debut as part of the Park Lane Group "Young Artists" New Year Series 2007, a concerto performance with the London Mozart Players and recitals at St. John's Smith Square, St. James's Piccadilly, St George's Bristol and Wigmore Hall.

Ella Brinch (viola) has received numerous awards and scholarships both in Australia and England. She has performed with many orchestras including the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Academy of St Martin in the Fields and the Philharmonia. Ella has been in high demand as a chamber musician appearing in various ensembles with artists such as Sakari Oramo, Alina Pogostkina and Peter Donohoe.

Ashok Klouda (cello) was winner of the 2006 J. & A. Beare Solo Bach Competition and the 2007 Royal College of Music Cello Competition, and makes his solo Wigmore Hall debut in 09-10, having won the Worshipful Company of Musicians/Concordia Foundation Young Artists Fund competition. Ashok has studied under some of the world's finest teachers including Colin Carr, Jérôme Pernoo and Louise Hopkins at the Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music and Hochschule der Künste Bern. Whilst a member of the Artea Quartet, Ashok performed in the Wigmore Hall, on BBC Radio 3, in the BBC Proms and at many concert venues throughout the country.

Views and Reviews

Eight String Quartets at the Cheltenham Music Festival 09

Roger Jones, Music Web International - Seen and Heard

"Haydn is generally regarded as the inventor of the string quartet, and for his bi-centennial the organisers of the Cheltenham Music festival had the happy notion of inviting ensembles from around the world to play quartets by Haydn and other composers.

The line-up consisted of three string quartets from Britain (the Endellion, Smith and Barbirolli) plus the Borodin from Russia, Meta4 from Finland, the Royal Quartet from Poland, the Quatuor Diotima from France, and the Australian String Quartet from Down Under.....

The Antipodes was represented by the Australian String Quartet who brought a fresh breezy tone of Haydn's Quartet in D minor, Opus 76 and plenty of Aussie exuberance to Mendelssohn's Quartet

The following day they teamed up with the Barbirolli to create the Ashes Quartet. As Australia and England were battling it out on the cricket field, the two quartets played together with impressive unanimity. Mendelssohn's Octet, performed with such verve and relish, made this the climax of a fortnight of chamber recitals."

A real powerhouse of passion. This was superb stuff - Wigmore Hall 11th May 09 - PLG

Bob Briggs, 19/5/09 Music Web International - Seen and Heard

"...the performances we heard tonight were of full-blooded romantic scores, and they felt right and good.

The Barbirolli Quartet bear's the name of Glorious John - a hero of mine from my schooldays when he was particularly kind to me. How he would have loved their playing. They got things started with a vital, virile and forthright performance of the *Serioso* Quartet, which brought out all the symphonic structuring of the piece. It's easy to see why Mahler lavished time and attention on it in making his orchestral version. Neither were the light and shade and tenderness neglected and the nose thumbing coda to the finale came off very well indeed. If I have one criticism it is that the slow movement lacked sufficient mystery, but that will come as the Barbirolli's interpretation ripens, as it most surely will. The Quartet revelled in the Ravel, making it seem the masterpiece it isn't but should be. There was some lovely playing here, most notably an almost miraculous pianissimo in the second subject of the first movement and a cool poise and calm in the slow movement which incorporated a beautiful seascape in the middle section. The finale was given as a real powerhouse of passion. This was superb stuff. "

Harrogate International Sunday Series - 18th Jan 09

Dave Robson, 23/1/09 Darlington and Stockton Times

"The first concert of five in this year's Harrogate International Sunday Series saw the young women of the Barbirolli String Quartet draw a very respectably sized audience to the Cairn Hotel.

Formed in 2003 while at the Royal Northern College in Manchester, the four have established themselves as a remarkably fine ensemble, as was evident in the flowing elegance of the opening piece, Alan Rawsthorne's *First String Quartet, Theme and Variations*, and in the following Beethoven *F minor, Op 95, Quartet Serioso*. There is still the strong promise that the players will develop further as they gain experience, bearing in mind that it takes a decade or more to develop the breadth and absolute qualities of a mature ensemble.

I watch them with interest, particularly in view of the high level of colour and sensitivity displayed in the well-balanced account of the Ravel *String Quartet in F* that rounded off the concert.

Timbre Merchants - Four Star Review - Chelsea Schubert Festival - 18th Sept 08

Nick Kimberley, 19/09/08 - The (London) Evening Standard

"In terms of both quantity and quality, Schubert's string quartets constitute a major body of work. A shame, then, that for the Chelsea Schubert Festival's only concert dedicated to quartets, the Barbirolli Quartet could find room for just one.

On the other hand, you could argue that the nine minutes of his *Quartet Movement* are so condensed, so focused, that they are complete unto themselves. So it felt in the Barbirollis' performance.

While Holy Trinity's acoustic is bright and forward, the background hum of ventilation and traffic did few favours to quieter passages. Despite that, the Barbirollis' approach favoured bold attack over pristine unity, and the music benefited.

If the players captured the fleeting moods of the Schubert, they also got the febrile, hyperventilating energy of Beethoven's *Fourth String Quartet*. Not that everything was tension and stress; there was a lovely, open-hearted lyricism in the third movement, while the finale kicked up its heels with skittish energy.

Without Haydn's example, neither Beethoven nor Schubert would have had such a firm foundation on which to build their quartets. It made sense, then, to open with the older composer's *String Quartet no. 65*, a work of infectious high spirits. There was a clear sense of shared pleasure in Haydn's bundle of little surprises: a change of tempo here, a momentary pause there.

These musicians really search for the right timbre; at one slow passage in the final movement, their combined sonority had the enveloping warmth of an organ.

Debussy's only string quartet made a fitting climax, its sense of structure looking backwards, its sound-world looking to the future. The Barbirolli Quartet invested it with an almost vocal quality, so that the piece unfolded like an opera without singing. Still young, these four women are already players to reckon with."

Prolonged applause for string quartet is well deserved - Harrogate Festival - 1st Aug 08

Paul Dyson 8/8/08 Ripon Gazette

"This young group promises much for the future"

"a fine performance in which the group's rapport and enthusiasm for playing with each other were both very much in evidence"

Cheltenham Festival - 9th July 08

Geoff Brown 14/7/08 The Times

"these former students of the Royal Northern College of Music certainly seem Rising Stars to me"

"forthright, full-blooded musicians, afraid of nothing"

"The Barbirolli's should be watched closely"

Wigmore Hall 7th April 08 - ROSL Arts

Bob Briggs 29/4/08 Music Web International

Barbirolli Quartet and Zephyrus, Wigmore Hall, London, 7.4.2008

"This recital is another in the monthly series Monday Platform, which features the best of young artists currently working in the UK, and what an interesting series it has been. Tonight we were introduced to two very different quartets, and what a repertoire there is for both.

The Barbirolli Quartet got the evening off to a fine start with a joyous performance of an early Beethoven quartet which, although in his favourite turbulent key of C minor, is full of the kind of high spirits which fill Haydn's quartets. After this Stillman and Singh changed chairs for the other works and gave us a quicksilver performance of Schubert's Quartettsatz. As light and frothy as Wolf's Italian Serenade, this interpretation was full of Italianate warmth and good humour.

Their crowning achievement was a truly great performance of Jánáček's 1st Quartet. Based on Tolstoy's novel of the same name, Kreutzer Sonata, in which a man describes how he murdered his wife because he suspected her of having an affair, Jánáček fills the music with high passion, love, tenderness and, ultimately, violence. The four movements are terse and full of event, frighteningly difficult to play and disturbing to listen to. The members of the Barbirolli Quartet played for all they were worth, seeming to live the story in an effort to ensure that we understood the details – and the ultimate inequality of it all.

I often find myself complaining that performances lack a true pianissimo, but not with the Barbirollis. Their dynamic range was so wide that they had us sitting on the edges of our seats to hear their most intimate thoughts and being overwhelmed by their fortissimos. The Barbirolli Quartet is a magnificent ensemble which, tonight, displayed great understanding and insight into the music it was playing."

PLG Young Artists - Purcell Room 9th January 08

Geoff Brown 14/1/08 - The Times

"At birth they were called the Stillman Quartet, after their first violinist. Now the four former students of the Royal Northern College of Music label themselves the Barbirolli String Quartet, a proud Mancunian name. They received a deservedly warm welcome on Wednesday in the Park Lane Group's January bonanza of new talent and new music.

However crowded the field, there's always a place for classical musicians so tonally robust and rhythmically precise. The incisive, rocking patterns of Elizabeth Maconchy's short String Quartet No 13 exactly suited their gifts. Joe Cutler's recent Folk Music proved another canny match, vigorously chugging through riffs and stomps with an attractive populist bent.

The sonic tapestry widened in the major Barbirolli exhibit, Berio's Notturmo of 1993; though this too came from the friendlier end of new music, with ghosts of melodies peeking in and out, and fetching crepuscular scurryings. Along with rhythmic precision, the Barbirollis' vast colour range proved vital here. I'd rush to hear this superb quartet again, even if they were called the Cat's Pyjamas."

London - Southbank Centre and Park Lane Group

Peter Quantrill April 08 - The Strad

“Elisabeth Maconchy’s String Quartet no. 13 of 1984 displayed the Barbirolli Quartet’s precision of ensemble at formidable rates of energy (9 January), with well-balanced contrapuntal lines in the outer movements that allowed us to appreciate the unitary nature of this short work...”

“...a superbly realised performance of Berio’s swansong to the quartet genre, Notturmo.”

“...Ella Brinch’s viola drew together the strands of a poetry nearing silence, introducing one doleful strain after another that floated away on a breeze of fluttering harmonics and unfulfilled gestures. The Alban Berg Quartet and others have made this a 20th-century classic by imposing themselves upon it, but the Barbirolli’s short bows and careful tentativeness captured something intimate and vulnerable that felt truer and closer to the work’s subtextual settings of the Holocaust survivor and poet Paul Celan.”

Purcell Room 9th January 2008

Anna Pickard - The Independent

“Equally adept in Maconchy’s and Cutler’s glowing counterpoint and the bone-white, ash-grey Berio, theirs was a well-crafted, emotionally mature performance.”

Barbican Hall 27th July 2007

Peter Grahame Woolf - Editor, Musical Pointers

“A fine and memorable evening at The Barbican, beginning with a visit to the thought provoking exhibition in The Curve

Next, two string quartets in the carpeted foyer, given by the international members of The Barbirolli Quartet. This was an intriguing and very satisfying Free Foyer Music event. The audience was at first small, mostly sitting on the floor. A good, sound account of the Haydn, with impeccable tuning and ensemble, was followed by the Beethoven which showed evidence of thorough preparation. A depth of interpretation, and unanimity in execution; no compromise for this Barbican debut! Rhythms had just the right degree of response to the musical narrative, the cellist often taking things a little forward. Beauty of tone predominated, and quiet was often very quiet, drawing in the listeners, but matched by surges of energy for the more dramatic passages and climaxes.”

21st April 2007 - Quartet takes on new name

By kind permission of Lady Barbirolli, the quartet is very pleased to announce that they have taken on a new name: **The Barbirolli Quartet**. The quartet met whilst studying at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and (individually) were recipients of several RNCM awards named after world-renowned conductor Sir John Barbirolli. He was principal conductor of the Hallé orchestra between the years 1943 and 1958 and a very important figure in Manchester’s musical life; the quartet are delighted to be able to reflect their ties with the RNCM and the greater area by way of this association.

Lady Barbirolli wrote in a letter (early April 2007):

"A little while ago the Stillman Quartet asked a friend of mine if they could change their name to the Barbirolli Quartet. They were told that I (Evelyn Barbirolli) would be delighted for them to do so provided that I could hear them play well enough - I am quite crippled at present and cannot move at all - The Quartet most kindly arranged to come to my house and play to me, including, at my request, part of a Haydn Quartet. They came and played and I was truly delighted. Obviously the members of the quartet are all individually expert players, but what gave me such pleasure is that they really played as a Quartet and all seem to want to continue to do so.