

**MUSIC**  
**DANISH STRING**  
**QUARTET**

ABERLADY CHURCH, ABERLADY

★★★★

THE Danish String Quartet's opening Lammermuir Festival concert – the foursome is doing two more over the coming weekend – felt a bit like a battle. It was as if the four young players were fighting the limitations of their medium, as if it could barely contain the strength of their ambition. At times they produced towering, orchestral-style textures that resounded grandly around the generous acoustic of Aberlady Church. At others they pushed the normally safely mellifluous quartet sound into strange, piquant sonorities that foxed the ear. It wasn't always pretty, but it wasn't meant to be – they had a clear vision and went with it. With such confidence and clarity, it's no wonder that

they've recently been taken onto the BBC's prestigious New Generation Artists scheme.

Their bracing approach made Janáček's already fairly strange *First Quartet* sound even odder – they made no apologies for its stop-start block forms, and played up its unpredictable harmonies with relish. It wasn't a performance you'd want to hear every day, but there was no denying its vivid intensity. Their *Brahms Clarinet Quintet*, for which they were joined by BBC *Young Musician*-winning clarinettist Mark Simpson, was softer but just as finely focused, and Simpson's warm, rich sound was the ideal contrast to the quartet's invigorating freshness. Best of the lot, though, were their versions of Scandinavian folk songs, soon out on CD. Inventive, heartfelt, sometimes raw, they summed up this astonishing foursome's exhilarating playing to a tee.

**DAVID KETTLE**