

CLASSICAL

Andreas Ottensamer/ Kelemen Quartet

The Queen's Hall

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If you've ever wondered what chamber music was really all about, this remarkable International Festival debut from Austrian clarinettist Andreas Ottensamer and the Hungarian Kelemen Quartet would have spelt it out beautifully. It was focused and intimate, yet almost symphonic in ambition. All five players breathed together with a single purpose and impeccable ensemble, yet also celebrated their vivid individual musical personalities.

What they played might have been two cornerstones of the (admittedly not huge) repertoire for clarinet and string quartet – the clarinet quintets of Mozart and Brahms – but they injected both with an astonishing, even provocative freshness, as if discovering the music for the first time. For the Mozart that meant a disarming freedom, while in the Brahms they dared to replace its autumnal nostalgia with a sense of desolate tragedy, utterly convincing in its deeply felt sincerity. Ottensamer's bronzed clarinet sound only added to the Kelemens' velvety yet steel-cored tone, with leader Barnabás Kelemen in particular playing with all the passion of a concerto soloist. A truly remarkable performance.

DAVID KETTLE