



The JACK Quartet: beauty of sound sculpted with surgical precision

A charmingly good-humoured scherzo, not devoid of swagger, was a high point. If the scherzo of Brahms's Violin Sonata no.3 shared little of the same vitality, the first-movement Allegro unfolded organically. The only major flaw in this performance was some tense vibrato that marred the baritonal reverie of the Adagio.

There was no shortage of expression or colour in Falla's *Suite populaire espagnole*, a reading characterised by a mystical 'Nana' and a fearsomely strutting 'Polo'. Franck's Violin Sonata wasn't the grand climax it was perhaps intended to be: Frühwirth and his pianist Milana Chernyavska were seduced into testing its elasticity, leading to a sagging of momentum.



Instinctive Romanticism in the playing of David Frühwirth

But in his encore – Kreisler's arrangement of Chaminade's *Sérénade espagnole* – Frühwirth was sweet-toned throughout, including in the melody's farewell on harmonics.

EDWARD BHESANIA

**Kala Ramnath (violin)**  
**Sanju Sahai (tabla)**  
**LSO String Ensemble**

LSO ST LUKE'S, LONDON 7 JULY 2011

LSO St Luke's is a venue that gently merges the spiritual and the secular, a quality that aptly matched the impression given by the music in this concert. The July dusk backlit North Indian violinist Kala Ramnath and tabla player Sanju Sahai who, seated on the floor, embarked on a lengthy *Rag Bihag*, a piece designed for the early evening. The stately, unhurried opening section allowed Ramnath to settle in at leisure, her honeyed sound aided by a tuning system that brought the range down by a 4th at the bottom. As momentum gathered, the occasional glanced smiles between the duo increased as the improvised rhythmic interaction gained speed and complexity, Ramnath returning Sahai's florid syncopation

with interest and bringing a contemporary feel through repetitive off-the-string ideas. The clarity of her playing was all the more remarkable for the extensive finger-sliding used, heavily decorating her improvisation in the 'singing violin' style that she has made her own.

Premieres of two short pieces by Max de Wardener brought a welcome contrast to the piped-in tambura drone that the duo used. The twelve-strong LSO String Ensemble was well deployed here, especially in the lament *Bilaskhani Todi*, where a range of atmospheric effects and moments of eerie stillness gently offered an alternative backdrop to Ramnath's rich lyricism.

JAMES CRELL

**JACK Quartet**

WIGMORE HALL, LONDON  
30 JULY 2011

In bringing the JACK Quartet over from New York for its London debut in an uncompromising programme of 20th- and 21st-century works, the Wigmore Hall seemed to prove it can be all things to all audiences. Suddenly, London's foremost chamber-music institution

might have been a SoHo loft. The quality of the silence before leader Christopher Otto launched into Ligeti's String Quartet no.2 (1968) said it all. If the first movement's abrupt intrusions were perfectly articulated, the supposedly static texture they exploded was itself intricately layered. It was as if the players were creating a new aesthetic, in which beauty is sculpted with surgical precision, and the roller-coaster quality of the music loses neither momentum nor control.

Convincing as the group was in the multi-layering of Matthias Pintscher's *Study IV for Treatise on the Veil* (2004), this piece suffered from standing alongside Ligeti's towering invention. After Cage's meditative String Quartet in Four Parts (1949–50), where the quartet sounded as if transformed into an elegant, ghostly viol consort, came another virtuoso tour de force, Xenakis's *Tetras* (1983). Super-agile glissandos, uninhibited noise (including playing on the bridge and tailpiece) and showers of pointillism poured from the players' fingers. It was an astonishing evening, and it will likely remain unsurpassed in my experience for quite some time.

EDWARD BHESANIA