

tar and wah-wah trombone brought things to a characteristically muscular close.

JIM GILCHRIST

MUSIC

Pavel Haas Quartet

Queen's Hall, Edinburgh



“The world’s most exciting string quartet” went the rather hyperbolic marketing blurb for the Queen’s Hall’s first New Town Concert of the New Year, from Prague’s Pavel Haas Quartet. But judging by the foursome’s remarkable mix of polish and spontaneity, of micro-control and passionate abandon – well, that description might just hit the

nail on the head. There was so much to admire about the Pavel Haas’s playing – their superb technical virtuosity and blazing musicianship almost went without saying. But most gratifying of all was their disarming sincerity: despite stepping hard on the drama, none of their performances felt calculated or contrived. Instead, it was as if they were there simply to share their passions with the Edinburgh audience.

That sincerity was there in an immaculate *Fratres* by Arvo Pärt, with cellist Peter Jarůšek’s immovable pizzicatos matched by movingly glassy harmonies from the other players. It was there, too, in a harrowing Schubert *G major Quartet*, D887, which

stared coldly at the desperation behind the composer's heartbreaking lyricism, in violist Radim Sedmidubský's nastily scrubbed repeated-note figurations in the scherzo, for example, or the turbulence of a closing movement of truly orchestral richness.

The evening's highlight, however, was a blistering account of Bartók's Fifth Quartet—eerily evocative in its night-music textures; whirling to its out-of-kilter Hungarian dance rhythms; and fearsome in the sheer might of its sonorous climaxes. "Wow," went a few inadvertent mutterings from audience members, even after just the seething opening movement. Wow indeed.

DAVID KETTLE



↑ Pavel Haas Quartet brought the 'wow' factor to their concert