

EDINBURGH FESTIVALS

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By Susan Nickalls



Substituting a string quartet for an orchestra gives a piano concerto a whole new perspective, as was evident in these rarely performed arrangements of piano concertos by Mozart and Chopin.

The straightforward melodic structure of Mozart's Piano Concerto in F, K413, is well suited to this more intimate line-up, and the light and pellucid quality of Melvyn Tan's piano contributions **blended beautifully with the Škampa Quartet's rich string sound**. It would have been an even more intriguing performance had Tan, a superb exponent of the fortepiano, been offered such an instrument.

Chopin's stripped-down Piano Concerto No 2 in F minor also offered some fresh insights into the music, although occasionally in the first and last movements it felt as if the quartet needed more robust support. But then the piano really is the star of this concerto, and Tan's sparkling performance was sheer delight.

There are few of Janáček's works so profoundly tender and intense as his **String Quartet No 2, Intimate Letters**, which encapsulates the older composer's obsessive infatuation with a much younger woman. She is there in the silvery harmonics on the viola and searing string sounds, all **conveyed brilliantly in this thrilling performance by the Škampa Quartet**.