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 Actor David Wenham appeared with the Sydney Art Quartet in the Words Are Weapons concert.
Picture: NIGEL HALLETT

WENTWORTH COURIER

David Wenham's homespun words and music

Steve Moffatt, Wentworth Courier

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WORDS and music have gone together since humans first began to articulate and hum, and occasionally some of the world's finest writers have linked these kindred forms of expression in ways which reach us with great power.

English novelist Rose Tremain managed it with humour in her historical novel *Music and Silence* set in the 17th century Danish court in which a performance by a quartet of viol players performing in the palace's wine cellar is ingeniously piped up to a dyspeptic king several storeys above.

Indian novelist and poet Vikram Seth wrote about the inner working and emotions of a modern-day string quartet in *An Equal Music*, arguably the best novel about music since Thomas Mann's masterpiece *Dr Faustus*.

And the great Russian author Leo Tolstoy would have us believe that a jealous husband can be so affected by a "dangerous" piece of music that he will kill his wife when he catches her with her supposed lover.

Actor David Wenham brought all three of these works to life in a small and intimate concert, dubbed *Words Are Weapons*, in which readings were interlaced with appropriate music performed by Sydney Art Quartet in the Yellow House, Potts Point.

ACOUSTIC

For the Tremain excerpts the SAQ — cellist and artistic director James Beck, guest lead violin Veronique Serret, second violin Anna Albert and guest violist Andrew Jezek — performed some dances from French Baroque composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Concert pour 4 parties de violes*.

The low ceiling and small space of the gallery — which was once a hub for artists Martin Sharp, Brett Whiteley and film-maker Peter Weir in the 1960s — meant that the close acoustic took some getting used to, but the group managed to evoke the early music sound with the use of minimal vibrato.

Wenham's reading captured all the accents of the fictional quartet — French, Italian and German among them — as well as the humour of the king who

shouted down to them after a loud belch: “That’s enough. I’ve got indigestion!”

For the Seth extracts we moved to the classical and romantic eras with a splash of Ravel, some elegantly witty Haydn and Schubert’s restless and passionate Quartettsetz, all of which best summed up the narrator’s observation that despite differences of opinion or personality once the quartet sits down to play, “We are one — I mute my will. I breathe”.



James Beck, artistic director of Sydney Art Quartet

VISCERAL

The Czech composer Leon Janacek wrote two quartets, both of which have been featured in the words-and-music format by the Australian Chamber Orchestra among others.

The first one deals with the composer’s reaction to Tolstoy’s novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the visceral first-person account of a husband stabbing his wife to death in a jealous rage because he suspects her of having an affair with a violinist.

“

Wenham wept real tears in the final moments as Pozdnyshev, acquitted of murder, finally begs for forgiveness

”

Wenham captured the callous, vain and psychopathic Pozdnyshev who believes Beethoven's sonata changed him into becoming a killer. The SAQ were on top form for Janacek's remarkable piece, which oscillates wildly between folk-inspired dance melodies interrupted by wild, spine-tingling bowing effects which capture the horror of the story.

Wenham wept real tears in the final moments as Pozdnyshev, acquitted of murder, sits on a train, finally begging the passengers for forgiveness.

The concert is very much a local affair — Wenham lives across the street from the gallery and Beck describes the SAQ as a “community group” which is willing to do something a little out of the box, whether its accompanying a nude composer being painted by Wendy Sharpe or blindfolding the audience. — and the intimacy and historical significance of the building adds to the experience.

The performance is repeated at 7pm on Wednesday, August 29, and Friday, August 31.

DETAILS

- **CONCERT:** Sydney Art Quartet and David Wenham: Words Are Weapons
- **WHERE:** Yellow House, Potts Point
- **WHEN:** Tuesday, August 28

