

Quartet of quality

By IFAN PAYNE

THERE has always, of course, been an element of music-making concerned with the quality of tonal production. But over the past 10 or 15 years, prompted in part by the flowering of the stereo recording industry, there has been an increasing concern with beauty of tone for its own sake.

This characteristic applies to orchestra, chamber ensembles, and to soloists alike and has often resulted in bland performances devoid of life or any meaning below the surface quality.

In chamber music only a handful of groups stand at the pinnacle where the just balance between beauty of tone and musi-

cal stimulation have been achieved.

The Tokyo String Quartet and the Alban Berg Quartet are two of these and to them must be added the Fitzwilliam String Quartet which performed a recital on Monday evening during the Fishguard Music Festival.

The Fitzwilliam has earned a considerable reputation for its performances of Shostakovich's *Quartet*. The group has, indeed, worked closely with the composer on its performances of many of these works.

This gave an added significance to the performance of Shostakovich's *Quartet No 1* and indeed

the playing was enchanting and lovely; even, surprisingly almost Mendelssohnian in quality.

The equally lovely performance of Borodin's *Quartet No 2* served to underline the fact that the quality of the Fitzwilliam playing of Shostakovich had served to accentuate its links with past traditions rather than suggest the way in which it might look forward to subsequent, stylistically less compromising works.

The performance of Beethoven's *String Quartet Opus 127* was equally striking for its beauty of tone and liveliness of rhythm, the only question being whether Shostakovich and Beethoven should sound so tonally and stylistically similar.