

Virtuosity and abandon

By IFAN
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THE Medici String Quartet's first recital in this year's Vale of Glamorgan Festival had been as part of *Wood Magic* — the presentation of the life and music of Edward Elgar.

During that performance the group had shown itself to be a musically attractive and committed ensemble.

The Medici's second recital was given in St Illtyd's Church, Llantwit Major, on Friday night, when the virtuosity and sense of abandon with which the quartet — augmented by Roger Chase, viola, and Christopher

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van Kempen, cello — concluded the concert as it whirled through the closing pages of Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* surely stirred even the most cynical of hearts.

The suspicion did cross my mind that Schoenberg's *Verklarte Nacht* was performed during the first half of the recital and the Tchaikovsky held till last to keep the faint-hearted from abandoning the church during the interval for the pub-lined old town square outside.

Actually, there are also some who are prepared to

abandon the concert hall for the bar at the thought of yet more Tchaikovsky.

By half time those did not know the Schoenberg work must surely have been convinced (as those of us who knew it already were) that this is music which conveys the impassioned radiance of moonlit romance at its most intense and that it is one of the great — and most attractive — works of the chamber repertoire.

The performance by the Medici ensemble of *Verklarte Nacht* could scarcely have been bettered.

It was a deeply-committed, sensitive and uplifting performance... the sort of performance that one immediately wanted to hear again.

The beautifully-poised

playing of Paul Robertson (violin) at the moments of great tenderness was particularly striking.

The concert had opened with a performance of Richard Strauss's Sextet from "*Capriccio*."

For all that, Strauss tends to be associated with large orchestral forces, the composer always had the ability to write for smaller forces and also to make intimate, as well as bombastic sounds with his skilful orchestration.

For every *Heldenleben*, one might say, there is an *Ariadne*.

But, on this occasion, the Medici seemed uncharacteristically cool in their presentation of Strauss's beautiful string sonorities.