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## Venue proves a resounding hit

### MUSIC

Australian String Quartet  
Ngeringa Cultural Centre,  
Mount Barker, Adelaide  
Hills, August 30.

### GRAHAM STRAHLE

Astonishing both visually and acoustically, the new Ngeringa concert hall in the Adelaide Hills is to be counted as one of Australia's finest chamber music venues. Lucky people of Mount Barker, where it has just been unveiled — that's all one can say.

The 200-seat auditorium is designed to a level of sophistication that one normally finds only in leading European centres.

Designed by architect Anton Johnson in collaboration with international firm Arup, which also contributed acoustic design to the Melbourne Recital Centre, it is a marvel and sound-wise quite the best venue this reviewer has encountered for small chamber ensembles.

Just how good it is was put to the test at the launch concert performed by a constellation of artists drawn from around the country. The Australian String Quartet, first playing Matthew Hindson's String Quartet No 3, *Ngeringa*, written for the occasion, were joined by harpist Marshall McGuire, flautist Geoffrey Collins and clarinetist Paul Dean in Ravel's Introduction and Allegro to close this remarkable event.

Helped by rammed earth and timber interior surfaces and a tall domed timber ceiling, the air felt

alive with sound, and the timbres of instruments came across with extraordinary clarity. The effect was to put a lens up close to each performance, which in turn seemed to inspire the players to give their best.

McGuire's harp playing was wonderful and melting in the slowly rolling waves of Ross Edwards's *Arafura Dreaming* with the ASQ and in the aria from Bach's Goldberg Variations.

Joined by guest violinists Susie Park and Brendan Joyce, the ASQ turned in a vigorous performance of Hindson's new quartet. With its gritty dissonances moving to serene meandering solos in violin and viola, it is a cogent work that graphically pictorialises the story of urban sprawl in an ancient landscape as represented by the rapidly growing Mount Barker township, and the creation of Ngeringa as a birthplace for new art.

The best performance was that of Ravel's Introduction and Allegro. Instrumental colours were ravishing and the rhythmic lilt quite infectious.

Pianist Kristian Chong gave a distinguished account of Rachmaninoff's Prelude in B minor, and he and young violinist Harry Bennetts were impressive in Janacek's Violin Sonata. Violinists Dale Bartrop and Lawrence Lee also contributed memorably in pieces by Mozart and Bazzini.

Ulrike Klein, founder and director of Ngeringa Arts, is to be congratulated for establishing this superb new venue.