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**Castalian String Quartet wins Merito String Quartet Award/Valentin Erben Prize**

**The Castalian String Quartet, which has been chosen as the winner of the first Merito String Quartet Award/Valentin Erben Prize from among the five best-qualified quartets, is a young group based in London. The prize has been awarded at the Wiener Konzerthaus in April 2018.**

**The Award sets new standards in the field, as the quartets cannot submit applications but are instead “observed” by a jury in numerous concerts over a lengthy period of time, without their knowledge.**

Dr Wolfgang Habermayer, owner of a securities firm, and Valentin Erben, founding member of the Alban Berg Quartet, initiated the prize. It will be presented to young string quartet groups whose musicians focus exclusively on playing in their quartets, are not older than 35 years of age, have already given concerts in the European region, but have not yet experienced a crucial leap in their careers. “The critical factor for us is how the young musicians behave in “everyday life” on the concert stage,” explains Valentin Erben. Wolfgang Habermayer adds: “We will now accompany and support the winning quartet professionally for four years to secure success on the international stage.”

After a group of 16 musicians, educators, event organisers and concert agencies had nominated 32 quartets, the five named most often were “observed” for a year anonymously by a special jury. The aspects that were evaluated included their professional approach, repertoire, programming, the artistic quality of the concerts, their musical profile, and also the imagination and innovation displayed by the musicians. Their artistic career to date and (CD) recordings, where applicable, were also evaluated.

Initiators Wolfgang Habermayer and Valentin Erben emphasise: “The certainty of our decision in favour of the Castalian String Quartet was impressive.” It was predominantly their wonderfully balanced instrumental skills and convincing interpretation that served as the deciding factors in the evaluation. “Apart from that,” continues Valentin Erben, “the human warmth and aura radiated by these four young people played a key role. They are never just putting on a show – the music is always close to their heart. You can feel their intense passion for playing in a quartet.”

Valentin Erben as chairman and the following members formed the jury:

Irvine Arditti (Arditti Quartet), Isabel Charisius (Alban Berg Quartett), Krysztof Chorzelski (Belcea Quartet) and Heime Müller (formerly Artemis Quartett).

**The Award**

The Merito String Quartet Award/Valentin Erben Prize is setting entirely new standards. Musicians usually apply to take part in competitions and then play the specified repertoire on a fixed date. In this Award, the selected quartets do not know that they are being heard and evaluated by members of the jury in two concerts over a period of one year.

The Award includes prize money of €20,000 for artistic development expenses. In addition, a budget of €25,000 is available for professional sound recordings and a composition commission. The prize will be awarded in the Wiener Konzerthaus, where the winning quartet will also be integrated into the chamber music subscription series. The premiere will take place here as well. Further performances will follow in other selected concert halls.

The Merito String Quartet Award will be presented every four years.

**Valentin Erben Prize**

In addition, Valentin Erben will loan four high-quality string instruments made by Greiner, if required.

Castalian String Quartet www.castalianstringquartet.com

Sini Simonen -Violin (Finland)

Daniel Roberts -Violin (England)

Charlotte Bonneton -Viola (France)

Christopher Graves -Cello (England)

**Merito String Instruments Trust GmbH**

Wolfgang Habermayer, founder of the Merito String Instruments Trust GmbH, launched the Award in 2014. The company acts as an intermediary between outstanding professional musicians who are looking for premium string instruments, and potential buyers. This supports musicians for whom particularly Italian period string instruments are almost impossible to acquire nowadays, due to rising prices.

**Partners**

The **Wiener Konzerthaus** is an important partner of this initiative. Ever since it was established, the Wiener Konzerthausgesellschaft has always played a significant role in the string quartet tradition. In particular, it supplied the Alban Berg Quartet with crucial assistance at the start of their career and furnished the quartet with their own concert cycle throughout their 38-year existence. The establishment still remains the home of world-renowned string quartets such as the Artemis Quartet and the Belcea Quartet. The Wiener Konzerthaus will therefore serve as the venue for the award ceremony and will work together with the prizewinners in the future.

Another partner is **Impresariat Simmenauer**, which is based in Berlin.