

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - SPRING SEASON 2024

SOLAS QUARTET

Katherine Hunka and Marja Gaynor, violins - Cian Ó Dúill, viola - Aoife Nic Athlaoich, cello

CASTLEBAR – Wednesday 17th January at 8pm – Linenhall Arts Centre

TULLAMORE – Thursday 18th January at 8pm – Esker Arts Centre

ROSSCARBERY – Friday 19th January at 8pm – St. Fachtna’s Cathedral - *presented by Barrahan Music*

CORK - Saturday 20th January at 1pm -Triskel Christchurch

DUBLIN – Sunday 21st January at 12pm – Hugh Lane Gallery

Matthew Locke [1621-1677]

Curtain Tune from *The Tempest* [1674]

Katherine Hunka

Pass the Hat [2023]

Old Wedding March (trad) arr. Marja Gaynor [2023]

Lord Mayo (trad) arr. Marja Gaynor [2023]

Alexander Borodin [1823-1887]

String Quartet No.2 in D major [1881]

1. *Allegro moderato*
2. *Scherzo. Allegro*
3. *Notturmo (Nocturne): Andante*
4. *Finale: Andante – Vivace*



SOLAS QUARTET

Founded in 2020, the Solas Quartet features four of our most exciting musicians. This is their third tour for NSQF.

Katherine Hunka, violin

Born in London, Katherine has been the leader of the Irish Chamber Orchestra since 2002 and regularly directs from the leader's chair. She has toured extensively with the orchestra as soloist and director and in 2020 her solo album with the ICO of Piazzolla and Schubert received glowing reviews. As a guest leader she has visited the Manchester Camerata, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Northern Sinfonia.

Katherine plays a lot of chamber music and is Artistic Director of the Killaloe Music Festival which sees international artists gather in her home village each June. Katherine enjoys performing many styles of music. Her group "The Far Flung Trio" with accordionist Dermot Dunne and bassist Malachy Robinson play across Ireland and the UK, music from Bach to Klezmer. In 2024 they will tour Ireland and the UK to celebrate ten years together.

She is a Lecturer at the MTU Cork School of Music and Artistic Director of ConCorda, a course for young chamber musicians.

Marja Gaynor, violin

Originally from Finland, Marja Gaynor is a Cork-based violinist and viola player. She specialises in Baroque music and is a member of Irish Baroque Orchestra and Camerata Kilkenny, recording and touring with both groups regularly. She has also performed with Irish Chamber Orchestra, Ensemble Marsyas, Dunedin Consort, London Handel Players, King's Consort and Helsinki Baroque Orchestra, and plays contemporary music with Dublin Sound Lab. Marja is known as a versatile musician at home in many different styles, a fluent improviser, as well as arranger and curator. Her string arranging credits include Oscar-winning song "Falling Slowly" from the movie Once, and Marja is also a long time member of the cult band Interference. Upcoming projects include chamber music tours with the Vanbrugh and performing and arranging as a trio with uilleann piper David Power and flamenco guitarist John Walsh. She teaches violin and chamber music in MTU Cork School of Music

Cian Ó Dúill, viola

Cork born viola player Cian Ó Dúill has performed with the Vanbrugh, Carducci and Calino String Quartets, the Fidelio Trio, the Avalon Ensemble, Chroma and the Crash Ensemble. He has played in chamber music recitals with Anthony Marwood, Finghin Collins, Jorg Widmann, Hugh Tinney, Natalie Clein, Howard Shelley, Kirill Troussov, and Patricia Rozario as well as appearing at West Cork, Killaloe, Ortús, Sligo Spring, Kilkenny Arts, Cheltenham, Warwick Arts, Chichester, Aldeburgh, Wye Valley and Kings Lynn Chamber Music Festivals.

Cian was a founder member of both the Regent String Quartet and the Rothko String Trio, played regularly with the Chamber Players and the London Mozart Players Chamber Ensemble and is currently a member of the period instrument Giordani String Quartet and Prism Ensemble. Concerto appearances include performances of works by Bach, Telemann, Mozart, Bruch and Hindemith in Ireland, the UK, Spain and Greece.

Cian is a member of the Irish Chamber Orchestra, was co-principal viola of the London Mozart Players and works regularly with the London Symphony Orchestra, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Britten Sinfonia. Cian is Head of Orchestral Studies at MTU Cork School of Music.

Aoife Nic Athlaoich, cello

Dublin born Aoife Nic Athlaoich enjoys a versatile career performing on both modern and baroque cello. As well as her position as principal cello with the ICO, Aoife is sub principal cellist with the Irish Baroque Orchestra and a co-founder of the Solas String Quartet. Aoife has performed at Ireland's leading chamber music festivals and is the former artistic director of the East Cork Early Music Festival.

Aoife studied at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin before continuing her 3rd level education at the Royal Academy of Music and won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London for her post graduate studies. Aoife lives in Cork city where she is a lecturer of cello at the MTU Cork school of Music. Aoife also teaches at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin and on the MA in Classical String Performance at the University of Limerick.

Outside of performing and teaching, Aoife enjoys spending free time with her family and dog Marty, she is also an avid all weather sea swimmer.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Matthew Locke [1621-1677]

Curtain Tune from *The Tempest* [1674]

Matthew Locke was an English composer, known mostly for his compositions for the theatre. He was appointed as court composer for King Charles II, preceding Henry Purcell in the job. Purcell's style may have been influenced by that of Locke's, and the two men were family friends - Purcell wrote an ode to Locke after his death.

'Curtain Tune' is the best known musical number from *Tempest*, a real kitchen sink of an opera elaborately staged at Duke's Theatre, London in 1674. The text was from a version of Shakespeare's play adapted by John Dryden and William d'Avenant and reworked for the opera by Thomas Shadwell. Shadwell used several composers to assemble the music, including Locke, who was responsible for the incidental music. 'Curtain Tune' precedes the opening of Act 1, depicting calm seas turning stormy. The piece is remarkable, not just musically, but for being the first English score with the composer's marking of dynamics instructions - with the likes of "soft" and "lowder by degrees" (sic). *Marja Gaynor*

Katherine Hunka

Pass The Hat [2023]

I wrote *Pass The Hat* in September 2023 for the Solas Quartet. I wanted to compose something that was energising and entertaining and not without its challenges. This short piece is about the power dynamics within any group. The hat, which appears to have a life of its own, insists on perilous virtuoso solos when worn. It is not quite clear whether the hat is something to be coveted or feared. *Katherine Hunka*

Old Wedding March (trad) arr. Marja Gaynor [2023]

Lord Mayo (trad) arr. Marja Gaynor [2023]

"Old Wedding March" is a Finnish tune I learned from fellow students during my college years in Lahti - we were young and eager to play Finnish and Irish traditional music, just for fun. It is known by many names, among them 'Finnish March', 'March from Ostrobothnia' and 'Napoleon's March'. The first written version comes from a collection of folk tunes by musicologist Ilmari Krohn, published in 1975, though the tune is doubtless much older. I have adapted and arranged the beautiful melody a few times over the years for different ensembles. This simple version, with little nods to klezmer harmonies and church organs, is newly written for this Solas Quartet tour.

We have paired it with an Irish march or air, known as 'Lord Mayo'. The tune is very old, and sometimes credited to harper Daithi O Murchaid, who enjoyed Lord Mayo's patronage. There are associated lyrics, also attributed to O Murchaid, but the tune is mostly known in its instrumental form. The earliest written version comes from 1724, in John and William Neal's "A Collection of the Most Celebrated Irish Tunes". I have based this arrangement on the melody played by uilleann piper David Power. *Marja Gaynor*

Alexander Borodin [1823-1887]

String Quartet No.2 in D major [1881]

Alexander Borodin was a remarkable man. Always interested in and talented at music, he spent most of his career as an academic chemist. He became a Professor in St Petersburg in 1864 and conducted important research in organic chemistry. Tall and good looking he spoke four European languages and was an ardent advocate of women's rights and education. In 1872 he helped found the first University course in Russia for female doctors. He had a passionate marriage to an eminent pianist, Ekatarina Protopopova. They had no children themselves but adopted children in need. He also composed some of the most glorious music of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Borodin was one of the Mighty Handful of Russian composers who laid the foundations for the later achievements of Russian music. Most of them composed little chamber music but for Borodin it was a lifelong interest. He started to

compose and play chamber music at home while a teenager. He played the cello while his best friend played the violin. They both played the piano.

The Second Quartet, composed in the summer of 1881, was dedicated to his wife to celebrate twenty years of marriage. All four movements are in sonata form. The first movement opens with the mellifluous main theme on the cello. The first violin takes over and the two instruments pass the theme back and forth until the violin introduces the more robust second subject. This is then played by violin and cello together. All the instruments interplay a four note motif as the opening comes to an animated conclusion. The development begins again on the cello which is answered by the violin. The viola also takes part in the thematic development and finally the second violin as well. The music slows for the start of the recapitulation. The movement ends quietly with the viola repeating the four note motif.

The Scherzo is built around a busy first subject where the first note of each bar is strongly emphasised. The second theme is a glorious waltz-like tune played by both first and second violins. The harmonies here (and in other parts of the quartet) mix lushness with astringency. At times it almost sounds like Mahler.

The famous (and much copied) third movement is a wonderful Nocturne. The sumptuous opening tune is introduced by the cello with a throbbing second violin and viola before being taken up by the violin. The second theme begins with an upward scale followed by a descending sequence of trills. This is played by the violins in turn. In the development the upward scale is used as an introduction to the main theme which is now played by all four instruments. After the viola has had its turn, Borodin constructs a canon with the cello leading and the first violin following a beat behind. He repeats this idea with the first violin leading and the second violin again a beat behind. The viola and cello provide a tremolo and pizzicato accompaniment respectively. The effect is wonderfully passionate and romantic. It is hard not to think of lovers lying entwined on a warm summer night (of which more below).

The Finale begins with a brief slow introduction made up of two different phrases. The first is played by the violins; the second, a more serious motif, by the viola and cello. The movement proper begins introduced by pizzicato cello and taken up by all the instruments in turn almost like a train gathering speed. The slow introduction returns at the beginning of the development, the viola and cello playing the first vivace and the two violins playing the second andante. Finally the slow introduction returns for a final time played by all four instruments in unison at the start of the recapitulation.

Russian critics have constructed a programme for the whole quartet. They argue that the cello stands for Borodin and the first violin for Protopopova. The first movement describes their meeting, the second with its waltz like theme their courtship. Their passion is consummated in the third movement and in the finale, what? Normal life resumes perhaps.

It is true that in the first and third movements the cello often introduces themes which are then taken up by the first violin. But this does not invariably happen and it does not happen at the climax of the third movement. If you are writing a quartet for your wife on the occasion of your wedding anniversary, the inclusion of a passionate and romantic slow movement seems quite natural. The marvel here is quite how romantic and passionate the third movement actually is. The rest of the quartet is abstract music. The whole quartet is beautifully constructed and is one of the great pieces of chamber music of its time.

This quartet was the last major work Borodin completed. After all he had plenty of other things to do. He died six years later of a sudden heart attack at a ball in St Petersburg. He had the good manners to complete an energetic waltz before dying almost immediately. Protopopova died six months later. Although Borodin's scientific work is not entirely forgotten, his music and, especially this Second Quartet, will continue to delight audiences for a very long time. FH

