

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2023

CARDUCCI QUARTET

Matthew Denton and Michelle Fleming, violins – Eoin Schmidt-Martin, viola – Emma Denton, cello

MANORHAMILTON - Wednesday 6th September at 8pm - The Glens Centre

MULLINGAR - Thursday 7th September at 8pm - All Saints' Church - *presented by Mullingar Arts Centre*

WEXFORD - Friday 8th September at 8pm - St Anne's Church, Killanne, Co. Wexford - *presented by Music for Wexford*

CORK - Saturday 9th September at 1pm - Triskel Arts Centre (*Gregson, Dennehy, Beethoven*)

BIRR - Saturday 9th September at 8pm - Birr Theatre and Arts Centre

DUBLIN - Sunday 10th September at 3pm - National Concert Hall

Dmitri Shostakovich [1906-1975]

String Quartet No.1 in C major Op.49 [1938]

1. *Moderato*
2. *Moderato*
3. *Allegro molto*
4. *Allegro*

Donnacha Dennehy [b.1970]

Pushpulling [2007]

Peter Gregson [b.1987]

Quartets: Four - Three Parallels [2022]

Ludwig van Beethoven [1770-1827]

String Quartet in E minor Op.59 No.2 (*Razumovsky*) [1806]

1. *Allegro*
2. *Molto adagio. Si tratta questo pezzo con molto di sentimento*
3. *Allegretto – Maggiore (Thème Russe)*
4. *Finale: Presto*



THE CARDUCCI QUARTET

An internationally renowned Anglo-Irish string quartet based in the UK, the versatile and award-winning Carducci String Quartet has performed everything from brand new quartets, classic works by Haydn, complete Shostakovich cycles, and even partnered with folk-rock icon Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull. Founded in 1997, the ensemble has won numerous international competitions, including Concert Artists Guild International Competition USA 2007 and First Prize at Finland's Kuhmo International Chamber Music Competition 2004. In 2016, they took home a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for their performances of cycles of the complete Shostakovich Quartets. This Shostakovich15 project was accompanied by a recording of quartets 4, 8 and 11 for Signum Classics, to which the quartet added a further volume in spring 2019 (1,2 and 7) acclaimed by Gramophone Magazine for its "...athletic, upfront performances, clear in texture, forthright in tone and bold in articulation." The quartet has released a bevy of acclaimed recordings on their own label, Carducci Classics, as well as Signum Classics, and their Naxos recordings of Philip Glass Quartets have had over six million plays on Spotify.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Dmitri Shostakovich [1906-1975]

String Quartet No.1 in C major Op.49 [1938]

When Shostakovich wrote his First Quartet, he had already composed five symphonies, two operas, a piano concerto and a cello sonata as well as many other works. More importantly he had also been through the potentially fatal fire of Stalin's disapproval and somehow lived to tell the tale. His spectacularly successful opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, had been officially described in January 1936 as *chaos instead of music* and he was subjected to a vicious campaign of public disgrace. Shortly afterwards his Fourth Symphony was withdrawn from performance on instructions from above and early the next year his powerful patron, Marshal Tukhachevsky, was arrested and later shot. This led to the terrifying incident of Shostakovich himself being interviewed by the NKVD on suspicion of being involved in a plot to murder Stalin.

His rehabilitation through the extraordinary premiere in November 1937 of the Fifth Symphony is well known when even the reluctant Party hierarchy was forced to reinstate him on a tidal wave of popular approval. And in the midst of all this mayhem, his first child Galina had been born in May 1936. The quartet was completed in July 1938 and premiered shortly afterwards.

So perhaps we should not be surprised by the gentle and reflective opening of his First Quartet, where he chooses amidst so much public dissection of his life to turn to the privacy and inwardness of the string quartet. The bright and transparent texture of this work and its absence of anger and sorrow make it almost unique. The first movement consists of two contrasting episodes, the first suggesting a philosophical calm not without moments of intense questioning, the second is almost operatic with one voice singing dramatically while the others enjoy a *buffo* accompaniment. Then the whole miniature process is repeated in compressed form, concluding with a brief chorale-like coda of transient but heart-aching beauty.

The second movement is a delightfully simple set of seven variations on a Russian theme first played by the viola's melancholy voice. Mendelssohn's name has almost crossed our lips several times already, but the third movement has to be a conscious homage to the master of sprites and things that fly by night, but with none of the deadly intent that inhabits Shostakovich's later Scherzos. There is a muted waltz-like interlude with hints of the masquerade; the ending is pure Mendelssohn. The whirlwind finale was apparently written first purely as a musical exercise and its boisterous high spirits fairly take the breath away, not just in themselves but as a reaction to the times. ◦ FH

Donnacha Dennehy [b.1970]

Pushpulling [2007]

Pushpulling was commissioned by the Printing House New Music Festival for the Contempo String Quartet. It's easy to hear what happens. I think there's a certain poignancy to the ever-elongating pushes away from home,

AUDIENCE SURVEY

Across all its concerts this autumn, the National String Quartet Foundation is asking for feedback from audiences in the form of an online survey.

We would be so grateful if you could take a couple of minutes to answer a few questions to help us plan and raise funding for future concert seasons. If you are attending more than one NSQF concert this autumn, please feel free to complete the survey for each one.

If you point your phone's camera at this QR code and tap the suggested link you will be taken straight to the survey. Should you lose this programme you can download it from nsqf.ie.



only to return, as sure as night follows day, to the same position again. A line from my teenage idol, Samuel Beckett, resonates when I think of it: "Thirty thousand nights. Hard to believe so few." *Donnacha Dennehy*

Peter Gregson [b.1987]

Quartets: Four - Three Parallels [2022]

Quartets: Four is the final part of Peter Gregson's two studio albums released by Deutsche Gramophone exploring what he calls the 'deliciously expressive medium' of the string quartet. He writes:

The title *Three Parallels* refers ultimately to the construction of the music where, at any given point, there are three voices in the quartet working together and one exploring its own path, only for that rogue voice to be joined by another voice spinning off on its own to the next phrase. The music is outwardly melodic and tonal, but not to be confused with comfortable. There are subtle details inside the quartet, ripples in the water, which develop and mutate over the three movements. Music on a page is nothing without performers to bring it to life, and I am indebted to the Carducci Quartet, Andrew Neubauer, and Penny Wright for enabling this work to exist.

Ludwig van Beethoven [1770-1827]

String Quartet No.8 in E minor Op.59 No.2 (Razumovsky) [1806]

Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven violin quartets dedicated to the Russian ambassador, Count Razumovsky, are attracting the attention of all connoisseurs. They are profound in conception and admirably written but not generally comprehensible. Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung 27 February 1807

This contemporary review reminds us of a time when Beethoven was a new music composer whose works were considered to be difficult verging on the incomprehensible. Now Beethoven's quartets are core repertoire, familiar to all chamber music lovers but still as demanding for the listener as for the player.

The very opening of the work points to the future, the almost abstract sound of two strong chords, followed by a rest and then a miniature motif barely two bars long. This is hardly the stuff of a classical first subject and yet both motif and chords become essential parts of the unfolding drama generating tremendous energy as well as unexpected harmonic moves. The second subject is equally energetic if rather less abrupt and substantially more good-humoured, but concludes with a rhythmically powerful march-like section that relates back to the opening. The development begins and ends with the hesitant and exploratory first subject and much is made of the opening chords and the march-like section. Just before the recapitulation the concentrated part writing and the extended use of chords in cross rhythm reaches an altogether new level of complexity. After this climax the revisiting of the original exposition seems quite straightforward. The coda savours all this movement's abrupt changes of mood and texture before suddenly collapsing.

The serene and solemn *Adagio* is simply one of Beethoven's great slow movements. The noble chorale-like progression of the music reflects the stately dance of the constellations in the clear night sky. It is by far the longest movement in the quartet, but you would still wish it to last longer. It does not tear at the heart strings in the way of the late A minor quartet, it is cast more in the mould of the late E flat major quartet's slow movement with its dicing with infinity.

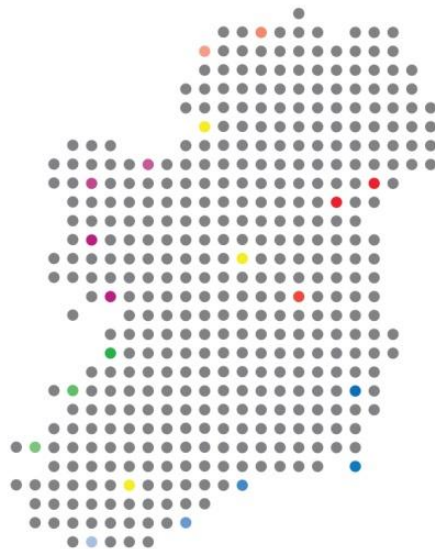
The *Allegretto* third movement returns to the restless brevity of expression of the first movement with a high-spirited figure with the accent on the off-beat forming the matter for discourse. We are still in E minor adding to the strangeness of this unusual dance. The *Trio* in E major sounds even stranger by reason of its normal flowing Russian theme with its delightful fugal entries and its humorous conclusion, such melodic pleasure is suddenly out of place amongst the gruff, deaf composer's new experiments. We get to hear the *Trio* twice, the threat of the third hearing averted at the last second.

There are more surprises in the *Finale* apart from the maniacally energetic dotted rhythm of the subject itself. In order to increase the tonal tension of a work all of whose movements are in E minor he begins this last movement in C major, which leads to a series of unexpected harmonic tricks throughout before finally resolving in favour of E minor. *Francis Humphrys*



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