

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2023

CONTEMPO QUARTET

Bogdan Sofei, violin, Ingrid Nicola, violin, Andreea Banciu, viola, Adrian Mantu, cello

CLIFDEN - Wednesday 20th September at 1pm – Christ Church - *presented by Clifden Arts Society (O'Leary, Schubert)*

ENNIS - Thursday 21st September at 8pm - glór

SKIBBEREEN - Friday 22nd September at 8pm - Abbeystrewry Church - *presented by Barrahan Music*

TULLAMORE - Saturday 23rd September at 3pm – Charleville Castle – *presented by Tullamore Gramophone Society*

DUBLIN - Sunday 24th September at 3pm - National Concert Hall

Joseph Haydn [1732-1809]

Quartet in E flat Op.33 No.2 'The Joke' [1781]

1. *Allegro moderato*

2. *Scherzo, Allegro*

3. *Largo e sostenuto*

4. *Presto*

Rebecca Clarke [1888-1979]

Poem for string quartet [1924]

Jane O'Leary [b.1946]

ConTempo ConVersations [2005]

Franz Schubert [1797 – 1828]

String Quartet in G major D.887 [1826]

1. *Allegro molto moderato*

2. *Andante un poco moto*

3. *Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Trio: Allegretto*

4. *Allegro assai*



CONTEMPO QUARTET

The Contempo Quartet is the resident quartet of the Galway Music Residency and was RTE's Resident Quartet from 2014 until 2019. Praised as a "fabulous foursome" (Irish Independent) and noted for performances which are "exceptional" (The Strad) and "full of imaginative daring" (The Irish Times), RTÉ ConTempo Quartet has forged a unique place in Irish musical life.

Since its formation in Bucharest in 1995, the quartet has performed more than 1,800 concerts world-wide in 46 countries, including prestigious venues such as Wigmore Hall; Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris; St Martin-in-the-Fields; Berliner Philharmonie; Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome; Carnegie Hall and the Opera House Tel-Aviv. ConTempo have had the honour to meet and play in front of world personalities such as Prince Charles, Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II, EU Ministers, Michael D. Higgins, Hollywood stars and Nobel Prize winners. The ensemble has won a record of 14 international prizes (including Munich, Rome, Berlin, Prague and London) and worked alongside artists of the highest calibre including Emma Johnson, Yuko Inoue, Hugh Tinney, Chen Zimbalista, Jérôme Pernoo, Peter Donohue and Martin Roscoe. Collaborations with other distinguished quartets have also been a feature, such as the Amadeus, Arditti, Vanbrugh, Casals and Endellion.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Joseph Haydn [1732-1809]

Quartet in E flat Op.33 No.2 'The Joke' [1781]

1. *Allegro moderato*
2. *Scherzo, Allegro*
3. *Largo e sostenuto*
4. *Presto*

This is the third of Haydn's Op.33 quartets that so impressed and inspired his equally famous colleague and friend, the 25-year-old Mozart. It is the only quartet in the set to have earned a nickname, one which the famous critic, player and writer, Hans Keller, described in his typically robust and indignant manner as being singularly inappropriate. The 'Joke' refers to Haydn's witty use of his opening phrase in the finale, where, against all expectation, he brings this phrase back at the end of the movement and then proceeds to totally confuse us by repeating it several times in such a way that there is no knowing when the show is over. Keller finds this compositional witticism both intriguing and prophetic of future developments and feels that calling it a joke rather demeans it. I suspect Haydn would have just asked if you got the one in the first movement.

The quartet begins with a leisurely Allegro moderato based on an expansive melody that unfolds over a sort of continuo bass. The close-knit development explores the potentialities of the theme's rhythmic components, followed by a recapitulation that is full of surprises. The good-natured Scherzo is enlivened by discreetly discordant touches and encloses a melodious Trio with a high-lying first fiddle part, whose fingerings, slurs and glissandi call for a relaxed, Viennese style of playing. The Largo is notable for giving the theme to the viola in a duo with the cello – Haydn and Mozart both played the viola and the story goes that they used to swap parts when playing through Mozart's string quintets. This however is the first time Haydn gives the viola a leading role, when the refrain next appears its place is democratically given to the second violin and only the last time around does the first violin reclaim his place. The eloquent and graceful theme twice bursts out in a rapturous declamation of great solemnity. The cheeky little finale then brings us back to earth. *Francis Humphrys*

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. This programme can be downloaded from nsqf.ie if needed.



Rebecca Clarke [1888-1979]

Poem for string quartet [1924]

Rebecca Clarke was born in London to American-English parents. She studied viola at the Royal Academy and the Royal College of Music, becoming a noted virtuoso on the viola, and was one of the first women to play in a professional orchestra. She worked in the string quartet medium throughout her long life, either as a performer, as a composer or as a teacher. At the age of eight, she was sent to learn the violin so that her father could have chamber music on tap in the family. Soon she was taking part in 'horrible attempts' on the quartet literature, with 'Papa... in his glory, snorting and grunting over the high notes in the cello part and telling us all what we ought to do'. The music found a receptive mind, though, and as an adult, Clarke studied, rehearsed or performed virtually all the monuments of the classical quartet literature and a broad range of contemporary quartets, working with many of the finest string players of her day, including Casals, Thibaud, Kochanski and Heifetz.

Her *Poem* for string quartet dates from 1924 and is a serene rhapsody on a single theme, with shifting tonalities in its gentle eight-minute progress, marked *Adagio* (literally meaning 'at ease')

Jane O'Leary [1946]

ConTempo ConVersations [2005]

Premiered at Galway Arts Festival in July, 2005, *ConTempo ConVersations* was written to celebrate ConTempo Quartet's 10th anniversary. Inspired by the different temperaments of the four musicians and their relationships within a string quartet, it is a light-hearted musical portrait. Conversations take place as they chat, laugh, argue, vie for prominence - sometimes acting together, sometimes doing their 'own thing'. You will hear a subtle hint of the 'happy birthday' tune just before the end. ConTempo mark their 20th anniversary as Galway's ensemble-in-residence this year; the celebrations continue!

Franz Schubert [1797 – 1828]

String Quartet in G major D.887 [1826]

1. *Allegro molto moderato*
2. *Andante un poco moto*
3. *Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Trio: Allegretto*
4. *Allegro assai*

My dear fellow, this is no good, leave it alone, you stick to your songs.

Ignaz Schuppanzigh (on finding Schubert's late quartets too difficult to play)

This extraordinary quartet stands at the very pinnacle of the repertoire alongside Beethoven's C sharp minor that was composed at exactly the same time. Both players and audience have to delve much deeper to comprehend this music, so far ahead of its time. Schubert's original plan back in 1824 was to write a set of three quartets dedicated to Ignaz Schuppanzigh, the famous violinist and leader of the Schuppanzigh Quartet.

Schubert's monumental work opens in a remarkable fashion – a quiet G major chord grows into a fortissimo G minor chord followed by conclusive aftershocks. This is the first theme, this major key – minor key altercation in a jagged rhythm with violent dynamics. A second idea follows quickly, building fragments from this chaos into a gentle singing over a hushed tremolo in the lower instruments. The savagery of the opening then returns as a third section in this first subject group. The second subject begins *piano* with a gentle theme in thirteen bars. This is immediately repeated with a shimmering triplet violin figure dancing above. Then a larger, more vigorous variant is presented and the two ideas are alternated so you get something approaching a theme and variations acting as the second subject group. The exposition is repeated.

The development is reached after an extended tremolo and the same material is worked through again. However when we reach the tremolo transition section, it is enormously expanded using material from the third section of the opening. When we finally reach the recapitulation, the opening figure moves from the minor key to the major and instead of the fortissimo outburst there is a *piano pizzicato*. Everything is changed now, the jagged edges are smoothed over and where there was aggression there is now hesitancy – all the material is now viewed through this perspective. The coda revisits the opening for one last time.

The Andante is perhaps not as famous as the Adagio in the C major Quintet, but it can move us even more. The cello's expansive main theme foreshadows the journey of the wanderer in *Winterreise*, it is as if the cello is trying to hold onto his mood of weary resignation. This mask however is savagely ripped off by an outburst of manic violence with ostinato-like dissonances whose brutality seems to anticipate Bartók. In these terrifying outcries that keep returning to rock the foundations of this movement we hear the sentence of death that Schubert was struggling to escape.

The Scherzo has a Mendelssohnian lightness of touch and though we are still in a minor key, the doom-laden mood of the opening movements is lifted. The Trio is vintage Schubert with the cello leading the Ländler, whose major-key dance-steps are all the more precious as we know their transience. More dancing follows in the last movement as Schubert returns to the hectic pace of the whirlwind tarantella that he had used in the D minor Quartet - the sheer drive and energy of this wild dance is almost enough to keep the shadows at bay, as if Schubert is saying that so long as the music keeps playing the darkness will stay away. *Francis Humphrys*

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