

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2022

CONTEMPO QUARTET

Bogdan Sofei and Ingrid Nicola, violins - Andreea Banciu, viola - Adrian Mantu, cello

GALWAY - Tuesday 6 September at 1.10pm - St Nicholas' Collegiate Church - *presented by Galway Music Residency (O'Leary, Brahms)*

LISTOWEL - Wednesday 7th September at 8pm - St John's Theatre and Arts Centre

TINAHELY - Thursday 8th September at 8pm - Courthouse Arts Centre

NAVAN - Friday 9th September at 8pm - Solstice Arts Centre

WEXFORD - Saturday 10th September at 1.05pm - St Iberius' Church, Main Street - *presented by Music for Wexford*

DUBLIN - Sunday 11th September at 3pm - National Concert Hall

PORTUMNA - Sunday 18 September at 7.30pm - Christchurch - *presented by Galway Music Residency and Shorelines Arts Festival*

Ina Boyle [1889-1967]

Quartet in E minor [1934]

1. *Allegro moderato*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Allegro molto*

Jane O'Leary [b.1946]

Strings in the Air, Songs in the Stones [2021]

Johannes Brahms [1833-1897]

Quartet No.3 in B flat Op.67 [1875]

1. *Vivace*
2. *Andante*
3. *Agitato - Allegretto non troppo*
4. *Poco Allegretto con Variazioni*



CONTEMPO QUARTET

Since its formation in Bucharest in 1995, the ConTempo 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. ConTempo Quartet was chosen as Galway Music Residency's Ensemble in Residence in 2003 and continues to captivate audiences throughout the city and county with its repertoire of classical, contemporary, folk and traditional music. In June 2016, the members were conferred with Honorary Doctorates in Music by NUI Galway in recognition of their role in promoting music and education in the West of Ireland. Earlier in 2022, they were conferred the Order of "Cultural Merit" in the rank of 'knight' from the President of Romania.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Ina Boyle [1889-1967]

Quartet in E minor [1934]

Ina Boyle was a prolific composer of vocal, choral, chamber and orchestral music, but her works are rarely performed today and few were published. She lived all her life in the family home, Bushey Park, Enniskerry, in the shadow of the great Sugarloaf. Her first music lessons were with her father, Rev. William Foster Boyle, who was curate at St. Patrick's Church, Powerscourt. With her younger sister, Phyllis, she was taught the violin and cello by their governess, and she started to compose at an early age.

She initially studied composition with several private teachers in Dublin as well as by correspondence with her cousin Charles Wood. She had her greatest success with her orchestral rhapsody, *The Magic Harp*, which was selected for publication in 1920 by the prestigious Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. She was the only female composer to be honoured by the scheme.

From 1923 she crossed the Irish Sea by steamship for lessons with Ralph Vaughan Williams, who thought highly of her music and encouraged her to have it performed. Unfortunately the outbreak of the Second World War ended her travels and cut her off from musical opportunities in London. She continued to compose throughout her life and never ceased to promote her music by sending scores to conductors and choir directors. Her friend Elizabeth Maconchy noted that as a result of her isolation she made few musical contacts and her music remained little known and almost unperformed.

Ina Boyles's Quartet was completed in 1934 and revised in 1937. It was written for Irish violinist Anne Macnaghten who both through her playing and through the long running Macnaghten Concerts in London, was a tireless champion of contemporary music. Trinity College and the Contemporary Music Centre hold a recording of the Macnaghten Quartet playing this work. Charles Wood and Charles Villiers Stanford had been prolific writers of string quartets over the turn of the century but the only other string quartets of note with an Irish connection from the 1930s were those of Elizabeth Maconchy and Frederick May. Maconchy wrote the first of her thirteen quartets in 1933 and May's Quartet in C minor was written in 1936 following his return to Dublin from Vienna.

Jane O'Leary [b.1946]

Strings in the Air, Songs in the Stones [2021]

dedicated to Eamonn O'Donoghue, Claregalway Castle & ConTempo Quartet

Written for a premiere in November 2021 at Claregalway Castle, a 15th century Anglo-Norman tower house on the outskirts of Galway and originally a stronghold of the Clanricarde Burkes. It was the scene of battles over the centuries and was captured by Oliver Cromwell in 1651, falling into disrepair after that. At one time the home of the Brian Boru harp, symbol of Ireland, the Castle has now been lovingly restored and is open to the public.

The music calls forth fragments of melodies, whispering voices, mystery and memory as we imagine the ghosts of the past. The title refers not only to the idea of songs being carried through history by the stones of the castle, but also Joyce's well known words from 'Chamber Music':

strings in the earth and air

Make music sweet...

All softly playing,

With head to the music bent,

And fingers straying

Upon an instrument.

Johannes Brahms [1833-1897]

Quartet No.3 in B flat Op.67 [1875]

Your letter was a great temptation to leave my pretty house, but all the same I stay sitting here, and from time to time write highly useless pieces in order not to have to look into the stern face of a symphony. So wrote Brahms from Ziegelhausen, during his summer holiday in 1875, to a friend who had invited him to a performance of his requiem. Amongst his useless pieces was the Third Quartet. It had taken Brahms the best part of twenty years to find the courage to complete his first pair of string quartets. Once he had broken the spell he felt liberated, and the B flat followed within two years – a buoyant and carefree work. He had escaped his fear of the medium and was able to have fun with it; nonetheless he wrote no more quartets. The next summer he finally completed his First Symphony.

The new quartet opens in exuberant style leaping forcefully off the page in 6/8 time. We are reminded of Brahms' convivial life-style and bonhomie as we shall be in the G major Quintet. A mysterious transitional idea in contrary motion leads to a second dance, a more sedate polka, and we discover these two dances are the principal subjects. The development is curious, full of strange pauses and hesitations, followed by a more powerful argument before the recapitulation comes leaping back in. The soaring melody of the F major andante leads us into one of Brahms' most magically romantic creations. The long love song of the first violin is spun out over a gently throbbing accompaniment until the D minor middle section bursts in. This also has its introspective passages but grows in intensity leading to a return of the song in the wrong key of D major. The correct key is found in time to rediscover the love song in all its beauty. The coda reaches a blissful conclusion.

The restless scherzo gives centre-stage to the viola, the only instrument allowed to remain unmuted. It is a substantial movement, but the dark viola colouring combined with the mutes places it in the realm of shadows; it is more in the tradition of intermezzo than scherzo, though Brahms calls the central section a trio. The Trio begins as a trio preparing for the entrance of the viola, which quickly dominates this part of the movement as well. This quartet is the first time Brahms uses a theme-and-variations form as a finale. The theme is an ambling mock folk tune, whose genial exterior conceals an intricate construction enhanced by a tendency to wander harmonically. This leads to eight variations that explore both the harmonic and rhythmic possibilities of the theme. Brahms' coup is on the seventh variation to bring back the opening theme of the whole work, followed in the eighth variation by the contrary-motion transition theme, also from the first movement. Having now gone full circle, he delightedly combines in counterpoint the themes from the first and last movements in the coda.

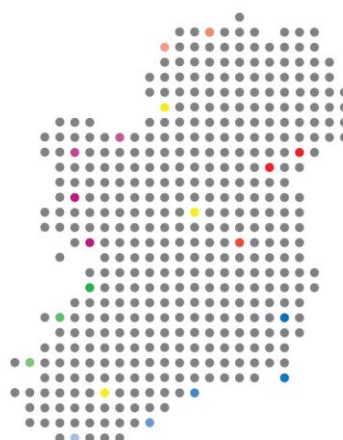
This useless piece was a great hit with Brahms' circle and Joachim waxed lyrical about the new work. Brahms dedicated the work to a Dutch physiologist, Theodor Engelmann, who had been his host when he played in Utrecht. He acknowledged the dedication with the perspicacious remark: *I have now no reason to worry about my immortality.*

Note by Francis Humphrys, West Cork Music



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