

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2021

# CONTEMPO QUARTET

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

**CASHEL** - Sunday 19th September at 8pm - Brú Ború Theatre

**CASTLEBAR** - Wednesday 22nd September at 8pm - Linenhall Arts Centre

**MANORHAMILTON** - Thursday 23rd September at 8pm - The Glens Centre

**MULLINGAR** - Saturday 25th September at 8pm - Mullingar Arts Centre

**DUBLIN** - Sunday 26th September at 1pm and 3.30pm – National Concert Hall

**Joseph Haydn** [1732-1809]

**Quartet in G minor Op.74/3 'Rider'** [1793]

1. *Allegro*
2. *Largo assai*
3. *Menuetto – Allegretto*
4. *Finale – Allegro con brio*

**Dave Flynn** [b.1977]

**String Quartet No.2 - The Cranning** [2004/2005]

1. 'Slip'
2. 'Slide'
3. 'The Bamako Highland'
4. 'Cran'

**Antonín Dvořák** [1841-1904]

**String Quartet No 12 in F Op.96 'American'** [1893]

1. *Allegro ma non troppo*
2. *Lento*
3. *Molto vivace*
4. *Finale: vivace ma non troppo*



**The Contempo Quartet** is the resident quartet of the Galway Music Residency and was RTÉ'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 G minor Op.74/3 'Rider'** [1793]

Haydn wrote so many quartets that it is more than understandable that posterity sought a way through the maze by labelling as many of them as possible. The Rider is one of the most popular of his quartets due to its infectious high spirits and doubtless it used to get more than its fair share of performances as it's so easily identified.

It was written at an extraordinary period in Haydn's life, when he had suddenly become a major international figure as a result of his first series of concerts in London in 1791-2. He had spent most of his working life at the Esterháza estate as both Kapellmeister and court composer. His works were well-known all over Europe, but the composer himself had never travelled beyond Vienna. Suddenly his music-loving patron died, his successor no longer needed a resident orchestra and the sixty-year-old composer was free to travel. It is in some ways comparable to the visits to the West by Soviet bloc composers as their travel restrictions were lifted – for instance when Shostakovich attended the Edinburgh Festival in 1962. The difference being that Haydn composed freely while in England and loved being feted wherever he went, while the gloomy Russian hated the limelight, was incurably homesick and only wanted to get back to composing his latest symphony.

The Quartet opens with an acerbic eight-bar introduction that remarkably goes on to become the central subject of the development. The first subject proper begins in the cello and works its way imitatively up through the quartet. This delight the four instruments show in echoing each other quickly establishes itself as a defining feature of this movement.

The E major slow Largo assai is justly famous and gives the impression of being more emotionally revealing of the composer than most of his slow movements, as though his adventures in London had extended his expressive resources. There is a central section in the minor. The Minuet and Trio are surprisingly introspective, perhaps in contrast to the famous last movement with its irrepressible Rider and its exposed writing for the first violin.

*Francis Humphrys*

**Dave Flynn** [b.1977]

**String Quartet No.2 - The Cranning** [2004/2005]

This piece is heavily influenced by the traditional music of my native Ireland. There are no traditional Irish melodies in the piece; however throughout the work's four movements there are techniques, modes, rhythms and feelings common to traditional Irish music.

Donegal traditional music has a particularly strong influence on the piece. Donegal fiddlers often use a very attacking bowing technique, which creates a heavy, aggressive sound. This aggressiveness characterises much of the piece and is my way of demonstrating that there's a lot more to Irish music than the saccharine 'Celtic' arrangements that have become synonymous with 'Irish' music in the classical music world.

The title 'The Cranning' refers to an ornamentation technique of the Uilleann Pipes, an instrument unique to Ireland. Cranning is used extensively in movement IV where the musicians repeatedly 'cran' on low D notes in poly-metric cycles.

There are influences other than Irish traditional music in the piece; references to African, Balkan, Classical, Jazz and Rock music occur at various points but overall an Irish sound is dominant, particularly towards the end where the only notes used are the notes of Uilleann Pipe harmony regulators, A, B, C, D, F# and G.

After I won the 2004 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival Composers Prize for the first movement 'Slip', I was commissioned by Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival to extend the work into a full string quartet. The finished quartet was premiered by The Smith Quartet at the 2005 Festival. The Irish premiere was given by the Contempo Quartet, the Russian and French premiere's by the Vanbrugh Quartet and the US Premiere by the New Juilliard Ensemble at MoMa

*Dave Flynn*

**Antonín Dvořák** [1841-1904]

**String Quartet No 12 in F Op.96 'American'** [1893]

The American Quartet, like the New World Symphony, was written whilst Dvorak was living and working in America. He had come to the United States in 1892 to head the National Conservatory of Music at an annual salary of \$15,000 - 25 times what he was paid in Prague - thanks to the enthusiastic patronage of Mrs Jeanette Thurber, the wife of a millionaire grocery wholesaler. After the railway investment bubble

burst in April 1893, her husband was bankrupted and Mrs Thurber was unable to pay Dvorak reliably and he returned home in 1895.

Mrs Thurber had hired Dvorak to help fulfil her dream of creating a national American style of Art music. The National Conservatory admitted unusually large numbers of poor and black students whose repertoire of folk music sat well with Dvorak's own inspiration from his native Bohemia. Dvorak believed the way forward for American music was not to follow the Europeans, but to draw from its traditional music stylistic features such as pentatonic melodies, drone accompaniment and obstinate (ostinato) rhythmic repetition.

The 'American' quartet, together with the E flat String Quintet op 97, was composed in the summer of 1893 in the small town of Spillville, Iowa. Dvorak had gone there immediately after finishing the New World Symphony to escape the New York heat and to enjoy the company of its colony of fellow Bohemians and of his wife and children who had come over from Prague for the summer.

Dvorak, a viola player himself, gives the viola the opening pentatonic theme, in a way that is reminiscent of the opening of Smetana's 'From my life' quartet. The equally memorable, mainly pentatonic second theme, played quietly on the first violin, has a nostalgic feel. So does the second movement's plaintive opening theme with its rhythmically ostinato accompanying figure. The viola spends most of the second movement playing variants of this figure, while the second violin and cello are at times liberated to indulge in the glorious melody.

While composing, Dvorak was inspired and probably pestered by the repeated call of a 'red bird, only with black wings' – the Scarlet Tanager. Dvorak made its call the basis of his third movement. In imitation of the persistent bird, the theme is played over and over again in various guises and at different tempi. The last movement romps home echoing Dvorak's inscription at the end of the score: 'Finished on 10 June 1893 in Spillville. I'm satisfied. Thank God, it went quickly.'

*Chris Darwin*

*The National String Quartet Foundation creates and sponsors projects which bring live chamber music to audiences throughout Ireland. It is committed to supporting musicians who wish to explore and perform the string quartet repertoire and to helping concert promoters present this rich and rewarding music. In addition to the support of its major funders, the Arts Council and RTÉ, the Foundation gratefully acknowledges the support of University College, Cork, Cork City Council and Cork County Council.*

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