

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2021

ESPOSITO QUARTET

Mia Cooper and Anna Cashell, violins - Joachim Roewer, viola - William Butt, cello

TINAHELY - Thursday 9th September at 8pm - Courthouse Arts Centre

NEWBRIDGE - Friday 10th September at 8pm - Riverbank Arts Centre

CORK - Saturday 11th September at 1pm - Triskel Arts Centre

KILKENNY - Saturday 11th September at 8pm - St Canice's Cathedral

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart [1756-1791]

Quartet in F major K590 [1790]

1. *Allegro moderato*
2. *Andante*
3. *Menuetto - Allegretto*
4. *Allegro*

Ian Wilson [b.1964]

Across a clear blue sky [2009]

Erich Wolfgang Korngold [1897-1957]

String Quartet No.1 in A Major Op.16 [1920-1923]

1. *Allegro molto*
2. *Adagio, quasi fantasia*
3. *Intermezzo*
4. *Finale*



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí
Cork City Council



The Esposito Quartet comprises four of our most distinguished musicians with a combined wealth of experience as recital artists, orchestral leaders and teachers, who have been playing as a quartet since 2010. The Quartet's name honours Michele Esposito, pianist and composer, who for forty years from 1888 was the initiator for much of the chamber music making in Dublin through the establishment of The Royal Dublin Society concert series.

Mia Cooper, violin

Mia Cooper has lived in Dublin since her appointment as leader of the RTE Concert Orchestra in 2006. She previously held principal positions with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and City of London Sinfonia, has appeared as guest leader of many of the UK's symphony orchestras. Equally at home as a chamber musician, Mia has participated in chamber music festivals, in Ireland, the UK, France, India, and Lithuania. Mia studied with renowned pedagogue Yossi Zivoni at the Royal Northern College of Music, and continued her training at the Paris Conservatoire. She teaches violin at the Royal Irish Academy of Music.

Anna Cashell, violin

Outside of her work with the Esposito quartet she performs regularly with her husband the pianist Simon Watterton and is a member of the Adderbury Ensemble and the Irish Chamber Orchestra. With the ICO she has performed in Heidelberg, the Wiener Konzerthaus, Würzburg, Rheingau the Lincoln Center and the Konzerthaus in Berlin. She regularly freelances with a number of orchestras in the UK such as the City of London Sinfonia, Manchester Camerata and the Northern Sinfonia. She has also performed and recorded with the Crash ensemble in America and Dublin and has recently co-commissioned a new solo violin work by the New York based composer Stephanie Anne Boyd.

Joachim Roewer, viola

Born in East Germany, Joachim Roewer graduated from the Hochschule für Musik "Franz Liszt" Weimar and the Orchesterakademie of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1994 he moved to Ireland to become principal viola with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, a position which he has held ever since. He has also worked as principal viola with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland and Camerata Ireland. On numerous occasions he appeared as soloist with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, recently alongside Anthony Marwood in Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante.

Joachim Roewer is a passionate teacher and a busy chamber music player. Outside his work with the Esposito String Quartet he was invited to perform with the Vogler Quartet, the Vanbrugh Quartet and the ConTempo Quartet and since 2013 he works as Artistic Director of the annual international Killaloe Chamber Music Festival. Joachim teaches viola and chamber music at the Cork School of Music and the MA course for classical string performance at the World Academy at the University of Limerick.

William Butt, cello

William Butt enjoys a busy career as soloist, chamber musician and is professor of cello at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin. On the concert platform he has performed extensively throughout Ireland, the UK, Europe and the Far East. He is a much admired exponent of the solo repertoire, having performed and broadcast numerous works for this medium by contemporary composers, as well as the formidable solo sonatas by Kodaly and Ligeti and the suites of Bach and Britten. Of his recording of the Britten suites, the Observer wrote: *'Warner have found a worthy successor to Rostropovich, for whom Britten wrote these three suites... Meticulously played, with the passion and commitment the composer discerned in their dedicatee, these elegant, eloquent pieces could not have been entrusted to a safer pair of hands'*

He has performed and broadcast all the major concerti, in 1997 he gave the Irish premiere of the Walton concerto with the National Symphony Orchestra, in 2001 the Dvorak concerto with the NSO and 2003 a tour of the Schumann concerto with the NSO. As well as a performance of the Protecting Veil by John Tavener with the Hibernian Orchestra he undertook a series at the National Concert Hall in Dublin in 2004 with the orchestra of St Cecilia and Barry Douglas in which he played the Dvorak, Elgar, Shostakovich (No 1), Tchaikovsky Rococo variations, and both Haydn concerti in three concerts over a two week period. He has also performed and broadcast the cello concerto by Victor Herbert with the Ulster orchestra. He plays on a fine cello made by Giovanni Grancino in Milan (1690).

Programme Notes

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart [1756-1791]

Quartet in F major K590 [1790]

In May 1789 Mozart arrived in Berlin in order to perform before King Frederick William, the King of Prussia. The King had a reputation as a fine cello player and as a generous supporter of composers. Naturally Mozart was hoping for a commission or even a job, so he performed several times for the King, who was sufficiently impressed to offer Mozart a post, the exact details of which are unclear. At that time Austria and Prussia were on far from friendly terms, so Mozart could hardly have accepted a posting in Berlin while remaining Court Composer in Vienna. The speculation is that Mozart was offered a post with a year to consider the proposal. In this case the commission for a set of six quartets for the King and set of six easy keyboard sonatas for the King's daughter may have been part of the proposal.

Modern research tells us that Mozart composed the first two movements of the F major Quartet in the summer of 1789, while he was still trying to meet the King's deadline. However events such as a seriously ill wife and the writing and production of *Così fan tutte* conspired against him and he was unable to complete the set for the King on time. Constanze's illness, in particular, terrified him, quite apart from the huge financial burden of doctors, medicines, special treatments and extra domestic help. However he managed to finish the quartet the following summer in order to make up a smaller set for publication.

This strikingly beautiful work is Mozart's last string quartet, completed about eighteen months before his unexpected death. The first two movements almost give the King's cello the status of soloist. In the last two movements the cello reverts to its normal place in the quartet, for, by this time, Mozart knew that the quartets would not be going to Berlin. Mozart's treatment of the cello in the opening movement is similar to his handling of the clarinet in the quintet K581, composed at exactly the same time. He holds the cello back from its prominent role until well into the second part of the first subject group, and only gives it a starring role when he reaches the second subject. The movement opens with a striking rhetorical flourish, one of those highly individual signature figures that is quite unmistakable whenever it appears. This theme is the main preoccupation of the entire movement, and even the cello's second subject is a smoothed-out version.

The normally restrained Mozart scholar, Alfred Einstein, waxed lyrical about the slow movement: *one of the most sensitive movements in the whole literature of chamber music...It seems to mingle the bliss and sorrow of a farewell to life. How beautiful life has been! How sad! How brief!* This may not be entirely fanciful as its composition coincided with the onset of Constanze's illness, which Mozart expected to be terminal. *Francis Humphrys*

Ian Wilson [b.1964]

'Across a clear blue sky' [2009]

'Across a clear blue sky' was inspired by Seamus Heaney's poem 'Horace and the Thunder', written after the terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Centre in 2001. In the past I have set some of Heaney's work to music for singers but this was the first time I took the opportunity to respond to one of his poems in a purely instrumental way. The freedom that came with this approach brought a sense of adventure to the writing process which I hope is mirrored in the piece itself. Heaney has an ability to always respond to diverse aspects of the human experience with insight and dignity, and I attempted to underpin the dark and aggressive elements in this piece of music with a sanguinity that I hope will acknowledge the poet's influence on it. I decided to incorporate some extra items into the performance, namely two portable analogue radios for (mainly) white noise and a number of drumming toys for the end of the work (all to be played by the quartet). The purpose of incorporating these items is deliberately ambiguous – some listeners might understand the drumming toys to be an ironic comment on the idea of war; others might take them as simply another sound source. Similarly, the presence of the radios might be taken literally as the idea of someone trying to find news about the event that inspired the piece while others, again, might hear them as a background 'wash' out of which the instruments emerge. It is not for me to say how they should be perceived. *Ian Wilson*

Erich Wolfgang Korngold [1897-1957]

String Quartet No.1 in A Major Op.16 [1920-1923]

The Austrian composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold is perhaps most associated with large scale forms - opera, major symphonic works and lavishly orchestrated film scores. Yet the relatively small body of chamber works he produced is no less impressive and actually offers a succinct distillation of his style and voice, often with considerably profound effect.

By the time he began to write the **String Quartet No.1 in A major** Op.16, Korngold, who had been one of the most amazing child prodigies in music history, was a seasoned veteran of twenty-three. Prior to starting work he had just completed what many consider to be his *magnum opus* - the opera *Die tote Stadt*. A sketch of the opening pages of the quartet exist that is dated Christmas 1920 and was presented to Korngold's father (the much-feared music critic Dr Julius Korngold) as a gift. Nevertheless, the Quartet was not actually finished until the spring of 1923 and is dedicated to the legendary Rosé Quartet. Arnold Rosé (Mahler's brother-in-law) was one of Korngold's closest friends. An exceptional work cast in four movements, this quartet is extremely demanding to play for all four instruments.

The first movement (**Allegro molto**) begins, typically, with an impetuous, highly chromatic figure that immediately grips the attention, before giving way to a supremely lyrical second subject of great beauty. Everything that follows is based on the conflict between these two ideas, and jagged dissonances and chromatic cluster chords frequently disrupt the harmonic canvas. The movement ends as rapidly as it began.

The **Adagio** marked *quasi fantasia* continues in highly chromatic vein (its opening bars almost suggest early Schoenberg) but the diffuse harmony quickly resolves into the ardent, almost operatic main idea, effectively a long-breathed song, supported by some of Korngold's most ravishing harmony and driven by an arching rising 7th. A secondary idea, a sinuous chromatic motif with a dissonant twist, constantly disturbs the elegiac mood. In the final bars, it returns one last time with eerie effectiveness.

In contrast, the **Intermezzo** which follows is a sunny, delightful piece showcasing almost every virtuoso string technique, elaborately overlaid with delicate filigree work in the inner parts, while the loveable main theme is based on a phrase that occurs in a number of later Korngold works, especially the 3rd Piano Sonata Opus 25.

The lyrical **Finale** starts with a song-like theme that refers to a quotation from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* inscribed at the beginning of the movement:

When birds do sing – hey ding-a-ding-ding

Sweet lovers love the spring

This melody, built on rising 4ths, is actually a variation on Korngold's motto theme – the *Motiv des fröhlichen herzens* (Motif of the cheerful heart) – which achieved its greatest prominence in his *Sinfonietta* Opus 5 (1912) a motto that he liked to include in all of his major works. He later incorporated this exact phrase (as it appears in the quartet) in his 5th opera *Die Kathrin* (1932 - 37). The finale sings eloquently and has a delicious second subject - a jaunty and irrepressible march. Korngold constantly builds the tonal resources of the four instruments by extensive double and even triple stopping, before ending on an extended trill in all instruments and a rapid concluding scale.

The Rosé Quartet gave the first performance of the quartet on 8 January 1924 in Vienna before taking it on tour, even bringing it to London in 1925. This concert tour presents the first performances in Ireland of this work.

Note by Brendan G Carroll © 2021

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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