

FICINO QUARTET

Elaine Clark and Hugh Murray, violins - Nathan Sherman, viola - Yseult Cooper Stockdale, cello

MULLINGAR - Wednesday 7th December at 8pm - Mullingar Arts Centre

BALLINA - Thursday 8th December at 8pm - Ballina Arts Centre

BIRR - Friday 9th December at 8pm - Birr Theatre and Arts Centre

CORK - Saturday 10th December at 1pm - Triskel Christchurch

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

Franz Schubert [1797-1828]

Quartettsatz in C minor D.703 [1820]

Allegro assai

Philip Glass [1937]

String Quartet No 3 "Mishima" [1985]

1. 1957: Award montage
2. November 25: Ichigaya
3. Grandmother and Kimitake
4. 1962: Body building
5. Blood oath
6. Mishima – Closing

Linda Buckley [1979]

Circuit Bend [2022]

Maurice Ravel [1875]

String Quartet in F [1903]

1. Moderato très doux
2. Assez vif - très rythmé
3. Très lent
4. Vif et agité



THE FICINO QUARTET

Formed in 2013, the Ficino Ensemble has been committed to exploring the vast chamber music repertoire and presenting thoughtfully programmed concerts. The group regularly perform as a string quartet, and the addition of winds and percussion gives the possibility of playing large-scale chamber works. The members share a dedicated approach to contemporary music and have premiered many works. In 2019 they collaborated with several composers of the Irish Composers Collective, where the musicians worked on pieces with the composers and premiered several new works for flute, harp and viola. Ficino Ensemble was recently joined by the Con Tempo String Quartet in a performance of works by Brahms, Mendelssohn and Enescu as part of the Dublin Enescu Festival. In 2018 they performed a concert with Olwen Fouéré as part of MusicTown in Dublin, which included a performance of Thomas Ades' Four Quarters and Ludwig van Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 132. The group have recorded two acclaimed albums, *Winter* and *Folk Songs*. Ficino Ensemble takes the name from Marsilio Ficino, the Renaissance philosopher who regarded music as a "contemplation of the divine".

ficinoensemble.com

Elaine Clark, violin

Born in Aberdeen, Elaine Clark studied with David Takeno at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, where she won several awards and prizes. After graduating with a First Class Honors Degree, she continued her studies with Viktor Liberman at the Utrecht Conservatory in the Netherlands. In 1996, she was appointed Co-Leader of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and has performed many concerti, including those of Berg, Brahms (Double Concerto), Bach, Tchaikovsky, and Mozart (Fifth Violin Concerto, as soloist and director) with various orchestras in Scotland and England. Since joining the RTÉ NSO, she has been a regular soloist with the orchestra, most recently in performances of Prokofiev Concerto No. 1, Tippett's Triple concerto as well as Vivaldi's Four Seasons and Piazzolla's Four Seasons of Buenos Aires, for which she was soloist and director.

As a member of the contemporary music group, Concorde, Elaine has specialised in contemporary violin repertoire, giving many Irish and world premieres and working closely with many distinguished composers. Elaine can be heard performing on Concorde's most recent CD, *Reflections*, and also *What Was*, the recently launched CD by Judith Ring. Elaine is very much in demand as a chamber musician and has performed numerous concerts around Ireland with the Clarion Horn Trio. In 2007, she was invited to guest-lead the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra for a series of concerts and since then, has also guest-led the Ulster Orchestra and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

Hugh Murray, violin

Hugh is a graduate of MTU Cork School of Music where he studied with Ruxandra Colan-Petcu. He currently lives and works in Dublin as a member of the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. He has also enjoyed appearances with the John Wilson Orchestra at festivals, the BBC Proms, and their UK tour. Recent orchestral work includes *Sinfonia* of London and Irish National Opera. Hugh has also been heard as the violinist on the UK touring shows *Les Misérables* and *Book of Mormon*. Chamber music appearances include Strauss *Metamorphosen* at the St. Endellion Festival, Cornwall, Brahms Horn Trio at the Juilliard School, New York, and premiering Ronan Guilfoyle's new work 'Allies' alongside jazz musicians David Liebman and Richie Beirach at the National Concert Hall, Dublin.

Nathan Sherman, viola

Nathan Sherman is a viola player who enjoys a versatile career. He was immediately attracted to the darker sonorities of the viola from a young age and chose to explore the instrument and its repertoire further at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, the Royal Academy of Music and the Escuela Superior de Musica Catalunya in Barcelona. Nathan is especially interested in contemporary music, where the viola has its richest and most diverse repertoire. He has premiered many works for viola, and has played and recorded with Crash Ensemble, Kirkos, and Evlana, and recently released a critically acclaimed album of new music for viola and percussion *Totemic* on Ergodos Records. He regularly performs in the historical performance groups Irish Baroque Orchestra, Camerata Kilkenny and Ensemble Marsyas, and with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra and Ulster Orchestra. Nathan is Artistic Director of Ficino Ensemble, and runs a community-based orchestra called the Offbeat Ensemble which raises money for music education projects for children.

Yseult Cooper Stockdale, cello

Yseult Cooper Stockdale studied in Cork, Dublin and Leipzig and enjoys a versatile career between the UK and Ireland. She has worked with both RTE orchestras, the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Welsh National Opera, Southbank Sinfonia and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. As chamber musician she has played in groups including the Vanbrugh, the Alberi Piano Trio, Musici Ireland, Crash Ensemble, Ficino Ensemble and London-based Scordatura Collective. She has a keen interest in exploring new music, and has performed over 50 premieres with Kirkos Ensemble.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Franz Schubert [1797-1828]

Quartettsatz in C minor D.703 [1820]

Allegro assai

This tantalising movement, dating from 1820, gives us the first glimpse of the power of Schubert's mature chamber music. He had already written eleven quartets but nothing that approached the extraordinary power of this solitary fragment. Schubert was only 23 when he wrote this riveting movement and his composition style was developing at an extraordinary rate, although he was clearly still having trouble with larger works for the following year he began and never finished two symphonies. The famous 'Unfinished Symphony' dates from the year after that, 1822. In each case posterity finds it hard to understand how such masterly fragments could have failed to drive their composer on to completion.

The movement is at once intense, eventful and compact. Schubert enters a new emotional world, glimpsing many facets of anguish in a few pages of concentrated, tightly knit music. The agitated first theme gives way to more consolatory lyrical ideas, but the initial momentum is never lost sight of, and the powerful return of the volatile opening at the end sets the seal on a circular unity. The hyperactive opening idea, unprecedented as a first subject in a sonata-form work, leads off like some intense scherzo, gathering the four players in turn on the way to its far-flung climax chord. The quixotic change from the intense, agitated first presentation to the slightly more contained unrest of the second presentation is quickly followed by the gentle beauty of the second subject. A further theme combines melodic simplicity with harmonic poignancy so tellingly that he assigns his special *ppp* marking to it. Such are the mesmerising materials of this deeply felt, perfectly formed movement. What gives this music its impact is not just the force of craftsmanship and mature judgement, but the sheer quality of the passion that drives it.

He began a second movement but broke off after forty bars. We shall never know why. *Note by Francis Humphrys*

Philip Glass [1937]

String Quartet No 3 "Mishima" (1985)

1. 1957: Award montage
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3. Grandmother and Kimitake
4. 1962: Body building
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6. Mishima – Closing

Philip Glass' Mishima String Quartet originally appeared as part of the film score for Paul Schrader's film on the life of author, playwright and latter-day Samurai, Yukio Mishima. The film, *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*, employs three distinct musical scores: full orchestra for scenes portraying Mishima's writings; string orchestra depicting Mishima's unworldly last day as his own militia usurps one of Japan's defence force headquarters; and string quartet for childhood flash-back scenes. As such, they often have a wistful, sometimes joyful, carefree feel. Glass was aware from the outset that the string quartet sections might work well when freed from the film and given a life of their own in the concert hall.

Linda Buckley [1979]

Circuit Bend [2022]

Commissioned by the National String Quartet Foundation with funds provided by the Arts Council

Circuit Bend is inspired by my experience of working with analog modular synthesizers, most notably the Moog System 55 which is characterized by its use of patch cords without a keyboard, oscillators and a step sequencer. I was particularly taken by Robert Moog's approach to building the synth, which he saw in a most human, emotive way: "Everything has some consciousness, and we tap into that. It is about energy at its most basic level."

Maurice Ravel [1875]

String Quartet in F [1903]

1. Moderato très doux
2. Assez vif - très rythmé
3. Très lent
4. Vif et agité

Ravel's only string quartet was written in 1902-3 and premiered in 1904. It became a cause célèbre when it failed to win the prestigious composition prize at the Paris Conservatoire and Ravel's popularity was such that the Director was forced to resign. The work is dedicated to his teacher Fauré, who had stood by Ravel during his long run-in with the Conservatoire. Although the work has many innovations it is still firmly rooted in the 19th century with its allegiance to sonata form, the traditional four movement format and the tonal harmonic system.

The music of Ravel, Debussy and Fauré has a curiously elusive quality, which the opening theme of this work demonstrates quite vividly. It is a sinuous and exotic melody and its companion, the second subject, has a similar flavour, though it has a more reflective character. The development allows a more dynamic view of the main theme before sinking back to its former languorous mood. The coda gives us one last exquisitely lingering embrace. The pizzicato second movement is a pure delight, a mechanistic precision that reminds more of Yeats' Byzantine golden bird - *More miracle than bird or handiwork* - than Ligeti's *meccanismo di precisione*. The vision of a miraculous bird taking flight is an irresistible image for this extravagant music. And the trio with its feeling of shimmering dusk *and evening full of linnet's wings* only adds to the atmosphere of spellbound transformation. The return flight of the golden bird is prepared with care and delicacy.

The muted calm of the *Très lent* features the wonderful alto voice of the viola. Its melody is first interrupted by an ethereal version of the first movement's main theme. Later an unmuted central section bursts in passionately but soon dies back. The second half is a long and exquisitely refulgent fading into the night with another magical re-scoring from the first movement. After this sumptuous nocturnal elegy the first bars of the last movement are uncomfortably jolting but its ingenious brilliance quickly fits into the prevailing mood. The first movement theme makes another cyclic appearance and the work ends with a bravado flourish. *Note by Francis Humphrys*

Coming up in Spring 2023

THE BANBHA QUARTET January 18th – 22nd

THE VANBRUGH February 10th – 12th

THE SPERO QUARTET February 15th – 19th

THE SOLAS QUARTET March 8th -12th

THE CALLINO QUARTET – March 22nd – 26th

THE VANBRUGH – March 24th – 26th

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