

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2023

# GEALÁN QUARTET

*Gina Maria McGuinness & Eoin Ducrot, violins - Fiachra de hOra, viola - Paul Grennan, cello*

**GALWAY** - Tuesday 7th November at 7.30pm - PorterShed A Dó - *presented by Music for Galway*

**BALLINA** - Wednesday 8th November at 8pm - Ballina Arts Centre

**CORK** - Thursday 9th November at 7.30pm - MTU Cork School of Music - *presented by Cork  
Orchestral Society*

**TINAHELY** - Saturday 11th November at 8pm - Coollattin House - *presented by Courthouse Arts  
Centre*

**DUBLIN** - Sunday 12th November at 3pm - National Concert Hall

**Robert Schumann** [1810-1856]

**String Quartet in A minor Op.41/1** [1842]

1. *Introduzione. Andante espressivo – Allegro*
2. *Scherzo. Presto – Intermezzo*
3. *Adagio*
4. *Presto*

**Michael Doherty** [b.1983]

**String Quartet No.3** [2023]

*Commissioned by the Gealán Quartet*

**Dmitri Shostakovich** [1906-1975]

**Quartet No 8 in C minor Op. 110** [1960]

1. *Largo*
2. *Allegro molto*
3. *Allegretto*
4. *Largo*
5. *Largo*



## GEALÁN QUARTET

Born in Dublin, **Gina Maria McGuinness** began her musical path at the age of four with Maria Kelemen and later followed her studies with Prof. Ronald Masin, winning the title “Young Musician of Tallinn”, Estonia in 1998. In 2006, she was invited back by the Estonian Symphony Orchestra on an Estonian tour of Brahms Double Concerto, and later gave her debut solo recital at the NCH Dublin alongside renowned pianist Alasdair Beatson in June of 2007.

Over countless years of leading the YES Chamber Orchestra (YESCO) and regular participation of the West Cork Chamber music festival, Gina developed her never ending love of chamber music. Her love flourished when she continued her studies with Prof. Shmuel Ashkenasi in Lübeck, Germany and later in Chicago, where she received her performance diploma with the highest of honor. It was here, home to the Chicago Symphony orchestra, that her passion for orchestral playing began. Gina later continued her studies in Lausanne “HEMU Site De Sion” in the class of Prof. Pavel Vernikov where she again received with high honor her Masters degree.

Once calling Switzerland her home for more than 10 years, Gina now lives in the West of Ireland with her family enjoying a freelance career, a proud member of the European Philharmonic of Switzerland (EPOS), frequently invited to the GAIA Chamber music festival, as guest co-principal player of the Brussels Philharmonic, the Berner Kammerorchester (BKO), City Lights Symphony Orchestra, the Irish Chamber Orchestra (ICO), our National Symphony Orchestra (NSO), RTÉ Concert Orchestra and the Irish National Opera (INO). Gina fondly plays an Andre Amati violin, School of Cremona, Ivano Conti.

**Eoin Ducrot** is a prizewinner at numerous international and national competitions both as a soloist and chamber musician, and has become an all rounded experienced performer, of solo, chamber music and contemporary repertoire. Eoin has premiered many contemporary works for violin and chamber music, and has performed as a soloist with orchestras such as Sinfonieorchester Basel, CSM Symphony Orchestra, and Orchestra du Cnr de Nantes. Eoin is the founder of the Opalio Quintet and a member of Quartetto Zart with whom he has performed all over Europe. He is working as the assistant of Raphael Oleg at the Hochschule fur Musik in Basel as well as being a guest player at Tonhalle Orchester Zurich. Eoin completed both his Performance Masters, and his Specialised Soloist Masters with unanimous maximum marks. He is currently doing post graduate studies in the class of Guy Braunstein as well as being a member of the masterclass series with Leonidas Kavakos at HSM Basel.

Dublin born **Fiachra de hOra** is currently in his bachelor studies at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, studying with Nobuko Imai and Marjolein Dispa. He has given recitals in the National Concert Hall in Dublin and in the Westport Festival of Chamber Music, and has performed as soloist with orchestras such as the Ulster Orchestra and the Conservatorium van Amsterdam Symphony Orchestra. He plays with a bow by Ivano Conti donated through the inaugural International Master Course held in the National Concert Hall Dublin in August, and plays on a Bertrand Galen viola supported by Music Network’s Music Capital Scheme.

Irish cellist **Paul Grennan** spent his childhood roaming the fields and beaches of County Wicklow. After studying at the RIAM he was accepted to the RNCM following masterclasses and a personal recommendation from the renowned cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Whilst at the RNCM, Paul won the John Bariboroli Cello Prize, received second place in the Premio Francesco Geminiani in Verona while also receiving scholarships and a Music Education Award from the MBF.

He has given chamber music recitals throughout Europe and worked on a personal basis with composers such as Kurt Schwertsik, Alexander Goehr, James MacMillan and Colin Matthews. Paul has performed chamber and solo works by James MacMillan and quartets and works for Cello and Piano by Goehr at the Wigmore Hall in London. As well as being a member of the wonderful Hallé cello section, Paul freelances with orchestras throughout the UK and Ireland including the The BBC Philharmonic, RLPO, Irish Chamber Orchestra, RSNO, BBC National Orchestra of Wales and more. He is currently on trial for principal cello with the RTE Concert Orchestra in Dublin. Paul has toured Asia, USA, Australia and Europe with various classical and pop groups as well completing a residency in the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts with the contemporary ensemble Psappha.

As a soloist, Paul has performed at the Stockhausen Festival and Minimalist Festival at the Onassis Cultural Centre in Athens as well as performing at the Barbican Hall with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in a production of Max Richter's *Memoryhouse*.

## 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 is available for download at [www.nsqf.ie](http://www.nsqf.ie)



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## PROGRAMME NOTES

**Robert Schumann** [1810-1856]

**String Quartet in A minor Op.41/1** [1842]

Schumann wrote only three string quartets, his Op. 41, which he dedicated to his friend and fellow composer Mendelssohn and gave their first performance in September 1842 as a gift to his wife Clara on her twenty-third birthday. The Quartets were written in only seven weeks in June-July 1842, a period of intense creativity that we now associate with the manic-depressive illness (bipolar disorder) that troubled Schumann all his life. The three string quartets are linked together by key: the First in A minor, with strong references to F and A majors, the Second in F major, and the Third in A major with references to F major and A minor. This structural use of keys related by thirds is an extension of a procedure used by Beethoven and Schubert and suggests that Schumann may have used this means to unite the Quartets into a cycle.

Before the 1840s Schumann's compositions were largely for his own instrument, the piano, but in 1838 he had written to Clara *the piano is getting too narrow for me. In composing now I often hear a lot of things that I can barely suggest.* He saw the medium of the string quartet as a *by turns beautiful and even abstrusely woven conversation between four people* and in 1839 began to compose three string quartets, but abandoned them, unfinished.

In February 1842 Clara and Robert Schumann left their home in Leipzig for a tour of towns in northern Germany. But Robert felt eclipsed by the brilliance of his young wife and in March he returned abruptly to Leipzig. He suffered a bout of depression which he tried to counteract by working on counterpoint exercises and studying the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. This helped him to write his Op.41 Quartets in the contrapuntally integrated style he advocated, and his immersion in the Classical Viennese quartets directly affected his use of sonata form. The large-scale unity that is a feature of the A minor Quartet derives from the tonal and thematic procedures that Beethoven explored in his Quartet Op.131.

Schumann's A minor Quartet begins with an Introduction that was obviously influenced by his contrapuntal studies of Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier*. The Allegro is unexpectedly in F major and is based on two lyrical themes reminiscent of his songs, and also includes short contrapuntal sections. The second movement is a scurrying Mendelssohn-like Scherzo in A minor with a smooth C major intermezzo as the Trio. The slow movement, in F major, has the nobility of a slow movement by Beethoven (of whom Schumann wrote, *I worship him like a god*) and a contrasting restless middle section. The Finale opens with a vigorous scurrying theme, with something of the exuberance of Schumann's own *Spring* Symphony, and this driving theme propels the work to a fiery conclusion. *Sarah M. Burn*

**Michael Doherty** [b.1983]

**String Quartet No.3** [2023]

String Quartet No.3 was commissioned by the Gealán String Quartet and written in the early part of 2023. Its three movements explore, in very different ways, the themes of convergence and divergence. The first movement does so through colour and the

second through rhythm. The third movement does so more literally, echoing two folksongs whose texts speak of separation and reunion. *Michael Doherty*

**Dmitri Shostakovich** [1906-1975]

**Quartet No 8 in C minor Op. 110** [1960]

The composer Sofiya Gubaidulina has written that the circumstances that Shostakovich lived under were unbearably cruel; she saw him as *pain personified, the epitome of the tragedy and terror of our times*. She believed that he was able to reach such a wide audience *because he was able to transform the pain that he so keenly experienced into something exalted and full of light, which transcends all worldly suffering*. These are not idle words; Gubaidulina herself went mad from the nightmare of those times. All commentators on Shostakovich come back to the same conclusion: he speaks the truth only in his music. At the same time as he was going through the Communist Party charade, he wrote the devastating *Satires* for Galina Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich, with the magnificent line, *And I am like the eagle-owl among the ruins of broken gods*.

And so in July of that year he was sent to Dresden to see the ruins and to write the music for a film on the bombing. Instead he wrote the Eighth Quartet, *ideologically flawed and of no use to anybody*, as he put it himself. It is by far his most popular Quartet and has even been turned into a Chamber Symphony by Rudolf Barshai, once of the Borodin Quartet. He dedicated it to the victims of Fascism to disguise his intentions; in fact he intended it as a summation of his life and told one friend that it was dedicated to *the author of this quartet*. He describes his famous monogram, D, Es, C, H (in the German notation). He lists the self-quotations, Symphonies 1, 8 & 10, the Piano Trio, the First Cello Concerto and *Lady Macbeth*, also Siegfried's Funeral March, Tchaikovsky's Sixth and the revolutionary song *Tormented by Grievous Bondage*. He continues, *Quite something this little miscellany!* On his return from Dresden, he played the quartet to Lev Lebedinsky on the piano and said with tears in his eyes that it was his last work.

So this quartet dedicated to his own memory opens with the unaccompanied cello playing the DSCH motif, which is to reappear in all five movements and to be of crucial importance in the opening and closing movements. Quotations from his First and Fifth Symphonies are threaded into the obsessive monologue on his name. This intense opening Largo is savagely interrupted by the explosive brute force of the second movement; fragments from the first movement are trampled by the sheer power of the explosion. The cathartic moment comes when high above this demonstration of brutality, the Jewish theme from the 1944 Piano Trio leads into its own terrified dance. For Shostakovich the Jewish people were symbols of all victims of persecution, himself included.

The Allegretto that follows has been described as a *scherzo macabre*, a waltz-like rondo on DSCH with the opening motto from the cello concerto he wrote for Rostropovich joining in. This is Shostakovich at his most bitter, as though he is describing the way people dance in a police state. The usual *rallentando* leads into the fourth movement and the eruption of Siegfried's Funeral March with terrifying effect, a requiem for all those who had been betrayed and stabbed in the back by senseless and cruel regimes. The quotations that follow had an even more intense meaning to him and the small circle that really knew his music. First comes the Siberian convicts' song, which has been variously translated as *Exhausted by the hardship of prison* and *Tormented by grievous bondage*. Even more poignant is the solo cello quote from *Lady Macbeth*. This opera, which caused him so much trouble with Stalin, was still banned and had come to symbolise all repressive measures against artists. The quote itself is a tender endearment sung by the heroine to the lover for whom she has sacrificed everything but who has long since betrayed her. Once more the cello returns with the DSCH motif to announce the final bitter and muted Largo. Shostakovich had no religious belief in the salvation of the soul, but here he writes the epitaph that we cannot forget - the epitaph both for himself and the desolation that he lived through. *Francis Humphrys*

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