

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2021

GEALÁN QUARTET

Eoin Ducrot and Brendan Garde, violins - Fiachra de hOra, viola - Paul Grennan, cello

SKIBBEREEN - Thursday 4th November at 8pm - Abbeystrewry Church

THURLES - Friday 5th November at 8pm - Source Arts Centre

MULLINGAR - Saturday 6th November at 8pm - Mullingar Arts Centre

DUBLIN - Sunday 7th November at 1pm and 3.30pm - National Concert Hall

Wolfgang Mozart [1756-1791]

String Quartet in D major, K.575 [1789]

1. *Allegretto*
2. *Andante*
3. *Menuetto (Allegretto)*
4. *Allegretto*

Sam Perkin

String Quartet [2011]

1. *Andante maestoso*
2. *Allegro con fuoco*
3. *Lento con grazia*
4. *Prestissimo scherzando*

Fanny Mendelssohn [1805-1847]

String Quartet in E flat major [1834]

1. *Adagio ma non troppo*
2. *Allegretto*
3. *Romanze*
4. *Allegro molto vivace*



Cork
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THE GEALÁN QUARTET

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.

Brendan Garde studied violin at Cork School of Music and at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) in Manchester, where he gained a BMus degree under the guidance of Leland Chen. While at the RNCM, Brendan was an ABRSM EU Scholar and was a finalist in both the Norman George Violin Scholarship and the Helen Porthouse Paganini Prize competitions. He was awarded the Weil Prize for chamber music in 2016. Brendan has since completed an MA at MTU Cork School of Music studying under Gregory Ellis, and was the recipient of the Cork Orchestral Society Emerging Artist Award 2019. As a keen chamber musician, Brendan has performed at many events and festivals, including the Ortús Chamber Music Festival, Salisbury International Arts Festival, Finding a Voice Festival, Kaleidoscope and the West Cork Chamber Music Festival. As a freelance orchestral player, he has played with numerous orchestras, including the RTÉ Concert Orchestra and the Cork Opera House Concert Orchestra.

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 2020, 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 Bariborli 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.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Wolfgang Mozart [1756-1791]

String Quartet in D major, K.575 [1789]

The years 1789-91 saw many dramatic changes in Mozart's life. Austria's war with Turkey was bleeding Vienna. Much of the nobility was involved in the army and others left Vienna for their country estates. The large orchestras of the nobility were disbanded and subscription concert series were abandoned for lack of support. In Mozart's life bourgeois society and the Schikaneder theatre were to replace the aristocratic salon and the court opera. Mozart's only court appointment required him to compose large quantities of dance music for the court balls given in the Imperial palace at Carnival time. In his endless search for money he would sell piano transcriptions of these dances to the publisher Artaria. It should be remembered that in the absence of copyright law, Mozart earned nothing from his huge success all over Europe. So apart from the Imperial commission for *Così*, Mozart had to turn his attention from concertos and symphonies to smaller scale works.

Thus the Spring of 1789 saw Mozart travelling to Berlin and Potsdam to meet the cello playing King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia in the hopes of either a commission or a remunerative post. Given Mozart's absolute determination not to compromise his independence and the fact that Austria and Prussia were recently at war, the latter option was always unlikely though it seems a serious offer was made. He was however given a commission to compose a series of quartets and sonatas, which he began on the way home. The D major Quartet was actually written on paper he bought in Bohemia on his journey back to Vienna. Unfortunately it would appear that there was a deadline on the completion of the commission, which Mozart was unable to meet despite strenuous efforts the following summer, and he ended up selling the three so-called Prussian Quartets to the publisher Artaria.

The first two movements of this strange Quartet are comparatively straightforward by Mozart's standards. However the actual sonority of the quartet is very new; it is not just the extensive role the cello plays, the music seems to inhabit another dimension especially the first subject and the B minor opening of the development. The Andante in A-major is in simple ternary form with no surprising modulations. It has that simple, unassuming beauty that Mozart so excelled at and the cellist gets his share of the limelight. The Menuetto is in the usual binary form with repeats; the first half has nothing unexpected but the second half drops the polite mask with some searing chords and brutal tonal shifts. The Trio is miraculous with the cello getting the delicious cantilena solo part at the beginning before handing it to the others taking care to integrate the cello soloist, however royal, into his quartet.

The Finale returns to the sound-world of the first movement but with a much more adventurous structure, a kind of modified sonata form. The main theme, in the cello again, is clearly related to the first movement. It is later accompanied by a counter melody in descending triplets that is made much of in the development sections. In place of a second subject the first returns at the second violin with new accompaniments and is followed out of nowhere by a beguiling new theme. The development concentrates on the triplet counter melody and travels through more modulations and dissonances than in the rest of the work. Clearly the cellist King had to be shown that good music can be complex as well as beautiful, challenging as well as melodic. *Francis Humphrys*

Sam Perkin

String Quartet [2011]

What follows is an honest and genuine reflection on my String Quartet, a work which I wrote 10 years ago now. I hope it may give you an insight into some of the challenges faced by the artist, things that you may not be aware of. I hope you find it a good read.

When I think of my String Quartet now in 2021, a work which I composed what seems like an eternity ago (10 years), I feel a number of different things. The first is how different the work is aesthetically when compared with my voice as a composer today. Artists change, just as we all change. Some of us change more than others, and some of us change less. Some of us accept change more easily than others, and some of us find it quite difficult. I find it fascinating thinking of how this work, which was my first commission as a composer, was at once a key stepping stone for me as a composer and at the same time how it can now be a work which no longer represents me as an artist today in 2021. I find this a challenging thought to grasp, but a very real one that most creative people must face. The work, which I am very proud of in its musical textures, revealed to me that texture is one of the most important elements in music to me personally, second only to harmony. Texture and harmony would be the two fundamental elements which music gifts us with that I would go on to explore, each time more thoroughly, in detail over the next 10 years; each time refining and going deeper. This endless exploration allowed me to discover what I now consider to be my genuine voice as an artist today. I believe that the over-consideration of the idea that a composer must 'have a distinctive style which is instantly recognisable', often stunts the growth of the artist. It is better to let the voice flow out of the artist, just as they are. We are all fundamentally creative beings, which is important to remember, and many of us do not let the artist within come out. I feel I have managed to find this flow, though it has not been easy, and it takes a love for and commitment to music that can simply not be forced. My advice to any creative person is to try to find a way to let your voice flow without worrying about finding 'your thing'. It will come out if you let it, as long as it has the space to do so. This will ensure that it is not forced, but genuine, honest both to yourself and to the people you are presenting your creations to.

All this does pose some inevitably un-useful questions that are nevertheless difficult to avoid: Is my writing today going to continue to evolve? Is my style set now, or will it change once again? Have I found my 'thing'? Let's forget these questions for this evening and just enjoy the music.

I sincerely thank The Cork Orchestral Society for originally commissioning the work, having faith in me, and giving me the opening to begin to let out what needed to flow out. I also thank The RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet for originally performing the work and I think back fondly of rehearsing in Greg's house in the countryside, no better place for a young composer to rehearse his first commission. *Sam Perkin (June, 2021)*

Fanny Mendelssohn [1805-1847]
String Quartet in E flat major [1834]

Fanny Mendelssohn, the older sister of Felix, was a prolific composer, a skilled pianist and a respected hostess of a flourishing Berlin salon (a fashionable gathering of notables, such as artists or statesmen, held at the home of a prominent individual). Fanny and Felix shared a common music education and developed an unusually close sibling relationship. When she was a child the family encouraged Fanny's involvement in music, not just as a performer but as a composer, but as she matured into womanhood her father let her know unequivocally that, while she had great musical talent, she would do best to focus on being a wife and mother. In a letter to her in 1820 he stated, "Music will perhaps become his [Felix's] profession, while for you it can and must be only an ornament". Felix had ambivalent feelings: on the one hand he had several of Fanny's songs published under his name, not to take credit for himself, but simply to get them into print, but he also thought it unbecoming for her to take on the career of a composer. (In a private audience with Queen Victoria the year before they both died within months of each other, the Queen asked him to sing a favourite song, Italian, after which Felix admitted that it was Fanny who actually composed the piece.) These attitudes were largely predicated by the social expectations of the time which offered women no prospect of a professional career, and even without her father's indoctrination, it is clear that Fanny was well aware of society's negative view of female creativity.

To create a musical outlet for herself, something that would not conflict with her role as wife and mother, Fanny took over the Sunday musicales for which the Mendelssohn residence had become famous. These blossomed under her direction with many famous artists and even full orchestras performing at the fortnightly concerts. She arranged the programmes, composed much of the repertoire, played the piano, and organised a small choir which she rehearsed on Friday afternoons. She married the famous court painter, Wilhelm Hensel, in 1827. He was always very encouraging and supported her prolific compositional efforts – an oeuvre of more than 400 works including lieder, piano and organ pieces, chamber music, cantatas, dramatic scenes, an oratorio and an orchestral overture.

Fanny's music reflects her deep reverence for both Bach and Beethoven as well as a strong influence from her brother. It exhibits a fine craftsmanship and lyricism typical of the post-Classical Mendelssohnian style, combined with her own experimental and inventive approach to form and content.

The String Quartet in E flat major was composed in 1834. This imaginative and elegantly lyrical work was Fanny's only one in the genre, and acknowledges her debt to the quartets of Beethoven. Opening with an Adagio ma non troppo, the implicitly serious and dark tone of the initial phrases immediately establishes a mood of quiet anguish, reinforcing Fanny's characteristically passionate nature. As the music progresses sudden emphatic chords further darken the ambient mood, accentuated by single plucked notes from the cello. Throughout the movement the key of C minor remains the guiding harmonic force until near the closing section which moves into the official home key of E flat major. The ensuing Allegretto in 6/8 time serves as a scherzo and is not unlike the famed "elfin" scherzos of her brother, but Fanny's music betrays a darker aspect as reflected in the C minor tonality. A dynamic central section abounds in very clever and impassioned counterpoint before a return to the opening section. The next movement is a plaintive yet poignant Romanze, cast in G minor, the key which Mozart chose for exploring deeply personal conflicts. The form is a free "interpretation" with frequent ventures into distant keys, modelled on late Beethoven. The concluding Allegro molto vivace is in sonata form; the assertive opening theme alternates with a dreamy rocking figure, reinforced by tremolo-like gestures from the lower strings before the piece ends briskly and emphatically. Having struggled her entire life with the gender constraints imposed by social convention, Fanny Mendelssohn finally decided to publish some of her music only one year before her early death at the age of 41. Until very recently, historians had limited her importance to the fact that her diaries and letters are valuable source material for biographical studies of her brother Felix. The true extent of her musical contribution has only been appreciated in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. *Elizabeth Dalton, 2020*

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.

Please visit www.nsqf.ie for details of upcoming concerts and to sign up to the Foundation's mailing list

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