

LIVERPOOL QUARTET

Róisín Verity Walters and Sarah Hill, violins - Dani Sanxis, viola - Nick Byrne, cello

LISTOWEL - Wednesday 2nd November at 8pm - St John's Theatre and Arts Centre (*Piazzolla, Gribbin, Shostakovich*)

GALWAY - Thursday 3rd November at 8pm - An Taibhdhearc Theatre - *presented by Music for Galway (Zemlinsky, Gribbin, Shostakovich)*

DROGHEDA - Friday 4th November at 7.30pm - St Peter's Church of Ireland - *presented by Drogheda Classical Music (Piazzolla, Gribbin, Zemlinsky)*

NEWBRIDGE - Saturday 5th November at 8pm - Riverbank Arts Centre (*Piazzolla, Gribbin, Shostakovich*)

DUBLIN - Sunday 6th November at 3pm - National Concert Hall (*Piazzolla, Gribbin, Zemlinsky*)

Astor Piazzolla [1921-1992]

Four Seasons of Buenos Aires [1965-1970]

Deirdre Gribbin [b.1967]

Merrow Sang [2007]

Alexander Zemlinsky [1871-1942]

String Quartet No. 1 in A Major, Op. 4 [1896]

1. *Allegro con fuoco*
2. *Allegretto*
3. *Breit und kräftig*
4. *Vivace e con fuoco*

Dmitri Shostakovich [1906-1975]

String Quartet No 3 in F major op.73 [1946]

1. *Allegretto*
2. *Moderato con moto*
3. *Allegro non troppo*
4. *Adagio*
5. *Moderato*



THE LIVERPOOL STRING QUARTET

Founded in 2010, the Liverpool String Quartet is made up of musicians who met whilst playing together in the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. The Quartet gave its first official concert on April 21 2011, in the town of Castellvell del Camp, Tarragona. Since it was founded, the LSQ has toured internationally dozens of times. Highlights include concerts at Castellvell del Camp, the Teatro Principal de Valls, the Cathedral of Pamplona, and in Olite, Navarre. In July 2012 the LSQ conducted a tour of the Balearic islands, with concerts in Valldemossa, Mallorca and performed in the inaugural concert of the prestigious International Music Festival of Mahon.

In Liverpool, the LSQ was Quartet in Residence at the Bluecoat Arts Centre in the heart of the city from 2012 to 2015, and at the Nordic Church from 2016-2018. Notable concerts given in Merseyside have been held at the Williamson Art Gallery, Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral, the Atkinson Art Gallery, Mayer Hall, the Music Room at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, and St George's Hall.

The quartet frequently collaborate with musicians such as former Concertmaster of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic James Clarke, violinist Rakhi Singh, clarinetists Francesc Navarro, Carles Pertegaz and Thomas Verity (Principal Clarinet WNO), flautists Eilidh Gillespie (Principal Flute, Scottish Opera) and Nelia Sanxis, and pianists Kiev Portella and Martin Roscoe.

They have also worked with DJ Spooky, Catalan actor Jaume Comas, and author Hunter Davies, as well as the late Sir Ken Dodd, with whom they collaborated on a CD of Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf and Howard Blake's The Snowman which was arranged specially for the quartet by the composer.

The Quartet is proud to collaborate with Catalan Music Company Ars Aurea Sonora, to promote the most outstanding national and international musicians on the scene in Spain.

During 2014 the LSQ was involved in a project called "Heart Variations for String Quartet" in which the LSQ gave the world premier of two compositions commissioned for the occasion by recognised Liverpool based composers, Ian Stephens and Meike Holzmann at St George's Hall in Liverpool, with outstanding reviews in the principal arts magazines of the North-West of England. In 2018, the LSQ's Beatles concert with Hunter Davies was a Carlisle Living Magazine's finalist for "Event of the Year".

More recently the Quartet has given many performances in Liverpool, at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall's Music Room, The Palm House and St George's Hall. In the aftermath of the recent lockdowns they performed a series of both evening and children's concerts outdoors at St. Luke's, Liverpool also known as The Bombed Out Church. It was very special to offer people a safe environment in which to return to the joy of live music.

The Quartet has plans to tour to Spain in the near future, and will soon be releasing their recording of their own arrangement of Piazzolla's Four Seasons.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Astor Piazzolla [1921-1992]

Four Seasons of Buenos Aires [1965-1970]

Piazzolla was born in Argentina in 1921 but by the age of four had moved with his family to Greenwich Village in New York City. At home he would listen to his father's records of the tango orchestras of Carlos Gardel and Julio de Caro and began to play the bandoneon after his father spotted one in a pawn shop in 1929. He also had music lessons with the Hungarian classical pianist Béla Wilda, a student of Rachmaninoff who taught him to play Bach on his bandoneon. Piazzolla's influences led him to become a trail blazer of a new era of tango. Piazzolla's '*nuevo tango*' was distinct from the traditional tango in its incorporation of elements of jazz, its use of extended harmonies and dissonance, its use of counterpoint, and its ventures into extended compositional forms.

Piazzolla's Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas were not originally intended to be performed as a set. The suite had its origin in 1965 when Piazzolla composed Buenos Aires Summer as music for a play. He followed this with Autumn

in 1969 and Winter and Spring the following year. He would perform them as stand alone works and occasionally as a suite starting with Autumn and ending with Summer. They were originally scored for Piazzolla's quintet of violin, piano, electric guitar, double bass and bandoneon.

In the 90s Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov rearranged the work for solo violin and string orchestra, adding more quotes from Vivaldi's Four Seasons and drawing a much clearer link between the two compositions. This version is often played alongside Vivaldi's Four Seasons in concert programmes today.

The Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas are not often performed by string quartet. When we decided we would like to add this work to our repertoire we found an existing arrangement for string quartet that drew mainly from Desyatnikov's reworking. However, we found ourselves drawn in time and again by Piazzolla's original recordings with his quintet. The intimate configuration of the string quartet felt like it added itself to a performance more reminiscent of this. We spent a summer in Spain touring this programme and slowly reworking and reshaping our parts and have ended up with a new hybrid informed by the parts of Desyatnikov and the recordings of Piazzolla! These incredibly evocative pieces have become one of our favourite works to perform and we hope you enjoy joining us on our journey to Buenos Aires. *Note by the Liverpool Quartet*

Deirdre Gribbin [b.1967]

Merrow Sang [2007]

Merrow (from Gaelic murúch) is the Irish Gaelic equivalent of the mermaid of other cultures. These beings are said to appear as human from the waist up but have the body of a fish from the waist down.

I was struck by the vivid description in this account from Fairy Tales of the Irish Peasantry describing the burial of one of The Cantillon family of Balyheigh whose family burial ground had been sunken in the sea off the coast of Cork. As was tradition after a death, the coffin was laid next to the water. A mourner hiding behind the rocks recounted. It was long past midnight, and the moon was sinking into the sea, when I heard the sound of many voices, which gradually became stronger, above the heavy and monotonous roll of the waves. I could distinguish a Keen, the notes of which rose and fell with the heaving of the water, whose deep murmur mingled with and supported the strain. The Keen grew louder and louder, and seemed to approach the beach, and then fell into a wail. As it ended I beheld a number of strange and, in the dim light, mysterious-looking figures emerge from the sea, and surround the coffin, which they prepared to launch into the water.

Also it has been recounted that merrow-maidens were reputed to lure young men to follow them beneath the waves. Sometimes they were said to leave their outer skins behind, to assume others more magical and beautiful. Merrow music is often heard coming from beneath the waves.

There is something very magical about these images and in this quartet Merrow Sang, I wanted to create webs of sound, almost like shades of the sea or water from which music emerges which is very strong, is half-heard and then vanishes transforming in a new skin. The real-time of the music is stretched and distorted as if caught in the clutch of a wave before floating to the watery surface.

Dmitri Shostakovich [1906-1975]

String Quartet No 3 in F major op.73 [1946]

Except for the slight edge to the cheerful first theme you could almost mistake the opening to Shostakovich's Third Quartet for late Haydn, symbolic of a classical innocence from which the music will progress to a clear-eyed but horrified awareness. There is even a carefully contrasted second subject and a classical exposition repeat. The development is a terse double fugue that works up an astringent climax before slipping into the foreshortened recapitulation. The movement concludes with an uproarious presto coda that drives the theme to an absurdist conclusion.

The mood for the second movement is almost shockingly grim. In Testimony he said, *You have to treat everything with irony, especially the things you hold dear. There's more chance then that they will survive.* But this is blacker than irony though the real bitterness is still held back. It is a strange movement, opening with a darkly coloured duo for viola and first violin, eventually giving way in the Trio to a mocking march overshadowed by the darkness from the opening. This then collapses in on itself leaving us to face the demons unleashed by the third movement. The violence and aggression is here undisguised, Stalinist Russia in 1946 in all its horror, no wonder Zhdanov and his henchmen ensured it was withdrawn from public performance. This is the man who said on the opening page

of his memoirs, *Looking back I see nothing but ruins, only mountains of corpses*. Such savage music immediately followed by the sorrow and despair of the great Adagio passacaglia and funeral march speaks louder than words.

This intensely moving Adagio is the heart of the quartet. Shostakovich himself on hearing the Beethoven Quartet play it twenty years later *sat quite still in silence like a wounded bird, tears streaming down his face*. The absolute simplicity of the passacaglia tells of a sorrow that can only be contained by the music; *and now let people hear the music, and then they'll see how to separate the important from the unimportant*. After the appearance of the funeral march, the music climbs to a desperate and impassioned climax before fading back into the remains of the march. Out of this the finale emerges, questioning and uncertain initially but leading to the gently lyrical Rondo theme and a clear attempt to return to the confident classicism of the first movement. This is underlined by a direct quote from the work's opening theme but this leads us to a devastating *fff* climax crowned by the return of the passacaglia theme and we know that there is no way back despite several half-hearted attempts. The end is one long-breathed coda with the first violin asking high and dissonant and unresolved questions. *Francis Humphrys*

Alexander Zemlinsky [1871-1942]

String Quartet No. 1 in A Major, Op. 4 [1896]

Although for many music lovers he is apt to be obscure, Alexander Zemlinsky was an important musical figure in the rich tumult of fin de siècle Vienna during the rise of the so-called "Second Viennese School." He was born in Vienna in 1871, three years before Arnold Schoenberg with whom his life would intertwine in a variety of ways. Zemlinsky revealed his musical talents early, began formal training at the Vienna Conservatory at the age of 13 and eventually blossomed into a first-rate composer, conductor and teacher. As a conductor, he was a respected interpreter of the emerging works of Mahler and Schoenberg drawing admiration from Kurt Weill and Stravinsky. As a young composer, Zemlinsky garnered praise from the elderly Brahms who recommended Zemlinsky's music to his publisher Simrock starting with the worthy Clarinet Trio, Op. 3, of 1896. The same year, Zemlinsky composed the first of four string quartets that collectively pursue a bold a trajectory from late Romanticism into 20th century atonal modernism in many way analogous to the contemporaneous four quartets of Schoenberg.

This is more than coincidence. Zemlinsky met Schoenberg when they played together in the Polyhymnia orchestra. Schoenberg married Zemlinsky's sister Mathilda and the two brothers-in-law cultivated a mutual appreciation of all things musical. Zemlinsky became the only formal teacher Schoenberg ever credited with the former overseeing the composition of Schoenberg's own first (unnumbered) string quartet in 1897. Both men would achieve great things in Vienna before WWII with Schoenberg eventually far outshining if not completely overshadowing Zemlinsky. As both came from Jewish heritages, both would flee Europe with the rise of the Nazis, setting in the United States as rather awkward old-world immigrants in a strange new world. Schoenberg fared well as a celebrated academic in Los Angeles. Zemlinsky landed in Larchmont, New York where he ceased composing and sank into oblivion, dying in 1942 at the age of 70. Schoenberg died in 1951 at the age of 76.

Zemlinsky's String Quartet No. 1 in A Major, Op. 4 is simply a masterwork of the genre, surely underplayed due to a variety of factors: Zemlinsky's less than household name, an intimidating association with Schoenberg along with his own more challenging later quartets, and the fact that stylistically, this quartet is "lost" between the major milestones of Brahms and Schoenberg. But this quartet is precisely a musical bridge between the two, an important steppingstone as well as a genuinely great string quartet entirely on its own merit. A classical and ample four-movement plan features a bright and vibrant opening sonata, a quirky scherzo with a visceral, quicksilver "Gypsy" dance trio, an aching late Romantic slow movement and a triumphant rondo finale. Throughout, Zemlinsky's music evokes Brahms, Dvořák and familiar foreshadows of early Schoenberg and Webern though, in the end, his voice is his own. Ray Silvertrust offers a suitable summary of Zemlinsky's legacy: "His works are an authentic testimony of the turbulent developments in music between 1890 and 1940. He stands between times and styles but in this intermediary position he found a rich, unmistakable, musical language. His personality and work epitomize one of the most fascinating epochs of art in Europe." © Kai Christiansen Used by permission.

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