

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2023

MARMEN QUARTET

Johannes Marmen & Laia Braun, violins - Bryony Gibson-Cornish, viola - Sinead O'Halloran, cello

CASTLEBAR - Wednesday 18th October at 8pm - Linenhall Arts Centre

CORK - Thursday 19th October at 7.30pm - MTU Cork School of Music - *presented by Cork Orchestral Society*

KILKENNY - Friday 20th October at 6pm - Parade Tower, Kilkenny Castle - *presented by Music in Kilkenny*

CASTLEPOLLARD - Saturday 21st October at 7pm - Tullynally Castle - *presented by Derravaragh Music Association*

DUBLIN - Sunday 22nd October at 3pm - National Concert Hall

Franz Schubert [1797-1828]

Quartettsatz in C minor D.703 [1820]

Allegro assai

Josef Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in D Op 33 no 6 (1781)

1. *Vivace assai*
2. *Andante*
3. *Scherzo: Allegro*
4. *Finale: Allegretto*

Garth Knox [b. 1956]

Secret Letters [2023]

- 1: *Over the waves*
- 2: *Running*
- 3: *Dream (and Jig)*
- 4: *Blessing*

Leos Janáček [1854-1928]

Quartet No.2 'Intimate Letters' [1928]

1. *Andante*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Moderato*
4. *Allegro*



THE MARMEN QUARTET

With a growing reputation for the courage, vitality and intensity of its performances the Marmen Quartet is fast establishing itself as one of the most impressive and engaging new talents in the chamber music arena. Formed in 2013 at the Royal College of Music, the Marmen Quartet were holders of the Guildhall School of Music String Quartet Fellowship (2018-2020) and studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Hannover with Oliver Wille as well as in London with Simon Rowland-Jones and John Myerscough (Doric Quartet). They were mentored by the late Peter Cropper and have received support from the Musicians Company/Concordia Foundation, the Hattori Foundation, Help Musicians and the Royal Philharmonic Society (Albert and Eugenie Frost Prize).

The Marmen Quartet has performed at venues including Wigmore Hall, Berlin Philharmonie, Boulez Saal, Frankfurt Alte Oper, Stockholm Konserthuset, Milton Court (Barbican), Palladium Malmö and Muziekgebouw Eindhoven. Festival engagements have taken the Quartet to the Amsterdam String Quartet Biennale, BBC Proms, Hitzacker, Lockenhaus, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, and the Barcelona and Gulbenkian Foundation String Quartet Biennale Festivals.

Highlights of the 22/23 season saw the Marmen Quartet taking part in the Australian National Academy of Music's Quartetthaus project, hosted in London by the Royal Albert Hall. Other UK highlights included a return to Wigmore Hall, as well as performances in Cambridge, Manchester, Belfast and Sheffield. In Europe, recital engagements took the Quartet to Bremen, Munich and Bern as well seeing them take part in the Heidelberg String Quartet Festival and undertaking an extensive tour of Ireland for the National String Quartet Foundation. Elsewhere, the Quartet made its debut in Israel with a tour including performances in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Marmen Quartet is an official Pirastro Artist. www.marmenquartet.com

PROGRAMME NOTES

Franz Schubert [1797-1828]

Quartettsatz in C minor D.703 [1820]

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. *Francis Humphrys*

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



Josef Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in D Op 33 no 6 (1781)

In the course of the five years from 1768 to 1772, Haydn published three sets of quartets, the Op 9, 17 and 20, in which the older Divertimento form evolved into the true string quartet with free and independent parts. The exercise during the previous decade of manufacturing over a hundred Trios for viola, cello and Prince Nikolaus Esterházy's baryton (a sort of bass viol with an extra set of resonating and pluck-able strings) had schooled Haydn in writing for individual string parts without an accompanying harpsichord.

This technical facility, his extraordinary structural genius, and the continued maturing of his creative powers happily came together to produce in the Op 20 quartets six works of revolutionary genius. But then Haydn wrote no more quartets for a decade, until the Op 33 set of six in 1781. Probably all his energies were used directing the music for 50 operas (5 his own compositions) and various marionette productions at the Esterházy palace. In 1779 the Prince engaged an attractive though not very good young singer, Luigia Polzelli, with whom the unhappily married Haydn developed a passionate relationship. Despite the substantial shortcomings of both her voice and her husband's violin playing Prince Nikolaus retained them for Haydn's sake. By 1780, energy flowed back into his symphonies and Haydn started to compose string quartets again.

He announced the Op 33 set to potential subscribers as "brand new *à quadro* ... written in a new and special way, for I have not composed any for ten years". Such advertising was maybe a bit of a come-on to revive the market, but the new set are altogether more relaxed and confident than the Op 20s. They have jokey *scherzi* rather than serious minuets, less "*Sturm und Drang*", more major than minor and a variety of different finale forms replacing Op 20's intellectual fugues. The Op 33 set appeared in Vienna just as the 26-year-old Mozart arrived there in pursuit of a freelance career. Haydn's new quartets catalysed Mozart into writing more quartets of his own, resulting in the famous set of six quartets that he dedicated to Haydn.

Today's quartet, the sixth of Haydn's Op 33 set, with its jaunty 6/8 rhythm, may well have provided some of the inspiration for the 'Hunt' quartet in Mozart's set. Haydn's writing is democratic – more of Goethe's ideal of a conversation between intelligent equals than some others of the set. One of his democratic devices in the first movement is for the first violin to hold a long high note, while the lower parts develop the material. Not only is the first violin kept occupied but the high note transforms the music. Mozart famously (thanks to Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*) demonstrated the power of this trick with the oboe's entry in the *Adagio* of his *Gran Partita* Serenade for 13 wind which was composed in the same year as this Haydn quartet. At the start of Haydn's second movement the first violin holds a high A for 18 *Andante* beats (rising to 22 later in the movement) while the second violin and viola play together.

The *Scherzo* is indeed jokey, but at the tempo of the conventional *Minuet* movement, rather than at the faster speed that became usual. The last movement has variations on two alternating themes the first in the major and the second in the minor. Haydn's ending characteristically wrong-foots the unforwarned listener. *Chris Darwin*

Garth Knox [b. 1956]

Secret Letters [2023]

Commissioned by the Marmen Quartet with funds from the Arts Council of Ireland

What do the individual members of a string quartet really think about each other? And how do they express that? If they could write secret letters to each other that would never be read, what would they say? This piece is woven out of these imaginary secret letters, written in the wonderfully ambivalent language of music.

Each of the four movements is led by a different player, which allows us to experience both their musical personality and their way of being in the group. This focus on the character of the individual is a way of generating musical material to be interpreted by the group as a whole and underlines that fact that although a string quartet is always more than the sum of its parts, the individual parts are what generates the quartet. *Garth Knox*

Leos Janáček [1854-1928]

Quartet No.2 'Intimate Letters' [1928]

His music is a breathtakingly close confrontation between tenderness and brutality, madness and peacefulness; it condenses the whole of life, with its hell and its paradise. Milan Kundera on Leos Janáček

The Second Quartet invites us into the intimacy of the seventy-year-old composer's relationship with Kamila Stösslova. He interrupted his work on *From the House of the Dead* for three weeks to write this erotic celebration of love. It is a daring work in many ways, not least in his experiments with different timbre, particularly with tremolo and *sul ponticello*. He replaces strict formal models with a structure of momentum and suspension; traditional development is taken over by swirling juxtapositions of themes representing dramatically contrasted moods. Also he frequently resorts to popular dance elements to make his point.

The music bursts into flames from the first bar, a passionate theme, which will recur throughout the four movements. *My feelings when I saw you for the first time*, wrote Janáček to Kamila. The first eight bars give way to a viola solo played *sul ponticello*; Janáček had for a time been obsessed with replacing the viola with a viola d'amore, seemingly attracted by the name of the instrument as much as its sound. The *sul ponticello* effect was his superb solution and quartet violists have been saved from the ignominy of being replaced by a baroque instrument.

Today I set to music my tenderest desire. I fought with it. It prevailed. It was like a birth. What would the destiny of this son have been – simply as we are, passing from tears to laughter? The viola opens the extraordinary second movement with a gentle lullaby theme, which slowly expands into music of extreme exaltation. This is eventually interrupted by a few short scales descending *flautato*, which usher in a presto with a popular dance theme, before bringing back the viola theme from the first movement. The *flautato* scales are then used again to signal the reappearance of these various ideas before the movement ends suddenly.

Today I wrote the number where the earth trembles. It will be the best. The third movement begins with a swaying barcarole. The central adagio section shifts to mysterious harmonies played very softly; a magnificent contrast occurs when the same music returns fortissimo, played by the violin at full stretch, and transfigured by a C major chord. The barcarole is brought back at several different tempos and there is a reminder of the mysterious central adagio before the movement ends suddenly with three cries. The last movement follows immediately, a rondo with a spirited dance refrain. The first episode again recalls the work's opening theme in four trilled notes. The second episode is played andante, and again calls up the four-note theme, *furioso sul ponticello*. The momentum is built up before an abrupt close. *Francis Humphrys*

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