

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2023

PIATTI QUARTET

Michael Trainor and Emily Holland, violins - Miguel Sobrinho, viola - Jessie Ann Richardson, cello

KILKENNY - Friday 24th November at 8pm - Parade Tower, Kilkenny Castle - *presented by Music in Kilkenny*

CORK - Saturday 25th November at 1pm - Triskel Arts Centre

BIRR - Saturday 25th November at 8pm - Birr Theatre and Arts Centre

DUBLIN - Sunday 26th November at 3pm - National Concert Hall

Bedřich Smetana [1824-1884]

String Quartet No.1 in E minor "From my Life" [1876]

1. *Allegro vivo appassionato*
2. *Allegro moderato alla Polka*
3. *Largo sostenuto*
4. *Vivace*

Deirdre Gribbin [b.1967]

'somewhere I have never travelled' [2015]

Antonín Dvořák [1841-1904]

Quartet No.13 in G major Op.106 [1895]

1. *Allegro moderato*
2. *Adagio ma non troppo*
3. *Molto vivace*
4. *Andante sostenuto - Allegro con fuoco*



Music in Kilkenny



triskel christchurch



PIATTI QUARTET

The distinguished Piatti Quartet are widely renowned for their 'profound music making' (*The Strad*) and their 'lyrical warmth' (*BBC Music Magazine*). Since their prizewinning performances at the 2015 Wigmore Hall String Quartet Competition, they have performed all over the world and made international broadcasts from many countries.

The Piattis are famed for their diverse programming and for passionate interpretations across the spectrum of quartet writing and have commissioned and recorded some of the most major and impressive works added to the quartet canon in recent years.

Since their inception they have always had projects in the recording studio with critically acclaimed releases through Linn, Somm, Champs Hill, Hyperion, Delphian, Nimbus and NMC record labels. Their wide-ranging discography and repertoire is thanks to their enthusiasm and curiosity in collaborating with a broad range of artists including some of the most recognisable names in classical music such as Nicky Spence, Julius Drake, Michael Collins, Barry Douglas, Janina Fialkowska, Melvyn Tan, Ian Bostridge, Katherine Broderick, Adam Walker, Simon Callaghan and the Belcea Quartet. Accolades in 2023 include Gramophone's 'Editor's Choice for the Month' with NMC, a five-star review from BBC Music Magazine with Delphian and in 2022 they were nominated for 'Recording of the Year' with both Limelight and Gramophone for their collaborative disc on the Hyperion label.

Contemporary music has been ever present in their repertoire and leaving a legacy to the quartet genre through commissions is one of the quartet's central tenets. Major commissions and dedications have stemmed from Mark-Anthony Turnage, Emily Howard, Charlotte Harding, and Joseph Phibbs whilst they have premiered a mesmerizing number of new works over the years beginning with Anna Meredith back in 2009. The Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Flagey Radio Hall Brussels, Wigmore Hall London, and the Aldeburgh Festival are some of the high-profile occasions where new music has been presented and recordings of Turnage's quartets 1-4 and Gavin Higgins' chamber music has also been extensively lauded by critics.

Historical research into quartet music that has been undiscovered or deserves to be better known has led to the premiere recording of Ina Boyle's (Ireland) SQ in E minor, and performances of lesser-known quartet gems by Ralph Vaughan Williams, E.J. Moeran, Rachmaninov, Ireland, Haas, Ulmann, and Durosoir.

The quartet's name is dedicated to Alfredo Piatti, a 19th Century virtuoso cellist who was a professor at the Royal Academy of Music (the alma mater of the founders of the quartet) and also a major exponent of chamber music and contemporary music of his time.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Bedřich Smetana [1824-1884]

String Quartet No.1 in E minor "From my Life" [1876]

The quartet opens with a violent hammer blow, a stark depiction of the dreadful hand fate had dealt Smetana. Two years before he composed this vividly autobiographical work, he had gone completely deaf and this opening movement depicts his horror and despair. The first subject is a violent declamatory phrase, which dominates the movement and contrasts vividly with the longing for what-might-have-been passionately depicted in the second subject.

The same frantic despair haunts the Polka rhythm of the second movement, which breaks only for the more genteel dance of the Trio, a reminder of the salons of the aristocratic patron who helped him in his youth. But even here the music has an edge to it that shows that the memory is far from happy. The Trio returns twice again at the end merging each time back into the Polka.

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



The Largo seeks out the very depths of sorrow, telling of his first wife Kateřina who bore him four daughters, three of whom died in the space of two years. He had already composed a Threnody for one of them, the four year old Bedriska, with the G minor Piano Trio, but this movement also encompasses Kateřina's death. The sense of loss and barely contained grief is overwhelming, mitigated only by two poignant glimpses of past happiness through a glass darkly.

The Finale at first gives every impression of being a triumphant conclusion, and revels in the composer's discovery of national musical ideas. Just as the work seems to be coming to an affirmative end, the strings plunge into a tense tremolando over which the first violin plays a fierce harmonic E – the note Smetana heard as he was going deaf. The fate motif is then quoted, as is the Largo, and the music slowly disintegrates, ending with three horrified pizzicati.

Francis Humphrys

Deirdre Gribbin [b.1967]

'somewhere I have never travelled' [2015]

*somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near*

*your slightest look easily will unclothe me
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose*

*or if your wish be to close me, I and
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly
as when the heart of this flower imagines*

the snow carefully everywhere descending;

*nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing*

*(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands*

E. E. Cummings, 1894 - 1962

Cummings poem is the inspiration behind this collaborative work. The speaker is the seer into the deepest soul of his listener. The language is direct, simple and poignant and it is the speaker who is the privileged one because he has the ability to look beyond the eyes of his listener into her soul.

'somewhere I have never travelled' is a series of snapshots of hidden glances caught briefly and released. This is what drew me to the words and to photographer Esther Teichmann enigmatic images, colour and speed of movement inherent in the human form. In the music I have enfolded a series of hidden names in melodic and rhythmic line.

Relationships and the fragility of love are outlined, opened and tightly wrought. The music is intertwined as lovers breathing outwards and is released.

It is that which we don't see or hear that lingers. *Deirdre Gribbin 2015*

Antonín Dvořák [1841-1904]

Quartet No.13 in G major Op.106 [1895]

Dvořák's music has no profundity. He does not, as Bruckner, dig into the depths of his soul to bring forth an adagio. Everything came too easily to him. One can see it in the last quartets, he tossed them off as he did with the first quartets. Though he equips them more richly here and there, no more challenging problematic of counterpoint or ideas commands his attention. He does not strive to go beyond the beautiful, harmonious sound and a healthy reality. [Robert Hirschfield, Vienna, 1904]

Dvořák has had a rough ride from the critics, more or less in inverse proportion to his popularity with audiences. Writers like Adorno considered that Dvořák's immediacy and trouble-free accessibility deprived music of its redemptive spiritual power. Such critics felt music needed to rouse and inspire the audience as in Wagner's generation or to make them critical and uncomfortable as in Schönberg's generation. Even the contemporary writer, who delighted in finding in Dvořák's music compelling alternatives to academic formalism, romantic excess and the desire to achieve profundity, never argued that his gift for natural melodic beauty was integrated with the formal depth of Beethoven or Brahms.

Dvořák came from humble peasant stock and was completely unspoilt by his enormous public success. On his return from America, he spent four months idling at home, delighting in his garden, his large family and his beloved pigeons. This was no dramatic artistic crisis but a spiritual relaxation after years of tense and restless travelling. He refused all tempting offers to return to New York as director of a National Conservatory and retired to the country. After the four months of idleness, he sat down and wrote in quick succession two quartets, in G major and A flat.

The unusual opening theme seems to express his overflowing happiness, while a subsidiary theme is equally upbeat. After a joyful outburst, we hear hints of the second subject, which nonetheless takes us by surprise when it suddenly springs out as yet another irresistible theme. A mysterious interrupted cadence leads to the powerful development where his melodic and harmonic invention is unparalleled. This continuous transformation of his material reminds us of Schubert as does the extraordinary slow movement. Dvořák does not explicitly use the dumky form here but he takes the outward plan of contrasting a pensive, minor-key lament with a relaxed, dance-like theme in the major and develops and enriches it in a way that demonstrates his total mastery of the medium. He moulds the whole movement into a dynamic and deeply moving whole that should be an answer to his sternest critics. The main scherzo theme has the character of a heavy-footed peasant dance, whose impact is softened by an unexpectedly mellow second subject. The trio is extensive, perhaps because Dvořák got carried away by his wealth of new tunes, but eventually the rollicking dance returns. Commentators disapprovingly describe the finale as very loose in construction, a kind of irregular rondo, which covers more or less anything. However the melodies just keep on coming in all shapes, a slow pensive introduction followed by a whole series of lively but contrasting ideas. Halfway through the movement, the pace slackens and the slow introduction is recalled and then suddenly wisps from the first movement are touchingly summoned up before the movement resumes. This cyclic idea is then repeated three times just before the coda, which concludes in wild euphoria. *Francis Humphrys*

