

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2023

# SONORO QUARTET

*Sarah Jégou-Sageman, violin - Jeroen De Beer, violin - Séamus Hickey, viola - Léo Guiguen, cello*

**MULLINGAR** - Wednesday 1st November at 8pm – Presbyterian Church – *presented by Mullingar Arts Centre*

**KINSALE** - Thursday 2nd November at 8pm - Methodist Church - *presented by Kinsale Amateur Orchestral Society*

**WATERFORD** - Friday 3rd November at 7.30pm - Large Room, City Hall - *presented by Waterford Music*

**SLIGO** - Saturday 4th November at 7.30pm - The Model - *presented by Con Brio*

**DUBLIN** - Sunday 5th November at 3pm - Townhall, 1WML, Windmill Quartet - *presented by Dublin International Chamber Music Festival*

**Ludwig van Beethoven** [1770–1827]

**String Quartet No.9 in C major Op.59/3 'Rasumovsky'**

1. *Andante con moto – Allegro vivace*
2. *Andante con moto quasi allegretto*
3. *Minuet – grazioso*
4. *Allegro molto*

**Seán Doherty** [b. 1987]

**String Quartet No.3 'The Devil's Dream'** [2015]

**Dmitri Shostakovich** [1906-1975]

**Quartet No 2 in A major Op. 68** [1944]

1. *Overture - Moderato con moto*
2. *Recitative and Romance - Adagio*
3. *Waltz - Allegro*
4. *Theme and Variations - Adagio*



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## SONORO QUARTET

Founded in 2019, Sonoro Quartet is one of the leading young string quartets of its generation. Hailing from France, Ireland and Belgium and performing over 40 concerts annually, their repertoire encompasses classical masterpieces alongside works and commissions by contemporary composers. In 2022, Sonoro Quartet was chosen as ECHO Rising Stars for the 2023-2024 season, embarking on a concert tour that includes 17 performances in leading European halls. The quartet has also been selected to join the MERITA Platform, where they will present concerts throughout Europe featuring an innovative artistic project. In 2023, they will make their debuts at Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Musikverein Vienna, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Kolner Philharmonie and Philharmonie de Luxembourg amongst other prominent venues. In July 2023, they made their debut in New Zealand performing 11 concerts in venues across North and South Islands.

In October 2021, the Sonoro Quartet received the 3rd prize and two special prizes at the Bartók World Competition for String Quartets in Budapest. Their energy, dynamic interpretation and musical maturity left a lasting impression on the audience and the jury. Sonoro has since returned to Budapest to perform Bartók's Quartets in the Bartók Memorial House. In 2022, they were selected as one of the participating quartets in the prestigious Banff International String Quartet Competition but had to withdraw due to injury.

The quartet is currently studying at the Netherlands String Quartet Academy (NSKA) in Amsterdam, receiving guidance from renowned artists such as Marc Danel and Gilles Millet (Quatuor Danel) and Eberhard Feltz. They have also studied with members of Quatuor Ebene, Pavel Haas Quartet, Belcea Quartet, and Artemis Quartet.

The quartet has performed at festivals such as Festival Midis-Minimes, B-Classic, Storioni Festival, West Cork Chamber Music Festival and Rotterdam Chamber Music Society, amongst many others. In autumn 2023, they will tour Ireland for the second time with the National String Quartet Foundation. They have enjoyed performing at renowned venues including Bozar Brussels, Liszt Academy Budapest, Bartok Memorial House Budapest, Tivoli Vredenburg Utrecht, National Concert Hall Dublin and The Piano, Christchurch New Zealand.

The Sonoro Quartet has recorded for international radio stations including Klara (Belgium), RTE (Ireland), Bartok Radio Budapest, SWR (Germany) and Radio New Zealand. As part of the Beethoven Fest 2020 in Bonn, they premiered Eric Domenech's string quartet on SWR. In 2024/25 they will record two albums including world premieres of works by Lucie Vellere, Joseph Ryelandt and Karel Mestdagh

## PROGRAMME NOTES

**Ludwig van Beethoven** [1770–1827]

**String Quartet No.9 in C major Op.59/3 'Rasumovsky'**

*There have been and will be thousands of princes; there is only one Beethoven.* So raged the composer when he felt insulted by one of his patrons insisting that he play for him and his guests. The truth of this is made plain to us when you think of the thousands and thousands who only know the name of Count Rasumovsky, the Russian Ambassador to Vienna, because he commissioned the three opus 59 quartets. When giving Beethoven the commission, Count Rasumovsky requested that he include a Russian theme in each of the quartets. The composer complied with this condition in the first two works in the set, but in this work, there is no recognisable Russian tune, though it is generally felt that the second movement has Russian overtones.

The harmonically mysterious introduction is surely a reference to Mozart's famous Dissonance Quartet, also in C major. The composer Robert Simpson was convinced that this work charts Beethoven's grappling with the terrible fact of his deafness, which he had already been struggling with for several years. Certainly, he wrote on the sketches for the last movement: *Make no secret of your deafness, not even in art.*

The strange, confused world of the introduction is followed by two chords and a *concertante* display by the first violin. This leads directly into the brilliance of a C major Allegro, power-driven by an enormous exuberant energy

## 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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bursting out in every direction. The second subject temporarily slows the pace before the exposition is rounded off by the driving rhythm led by the cello. After the repeat, the development concerns itself with the *concertante* ambitions of the first violin and the questioning phrases of the second subject, sensibly leaving the boisterous main theme out of the argument. The recapitulation lets him in again, but the coda brings the movement to an uncertain end, almost as directionless as the opening.

Robert Simpson saw the second movement as describing the solitary imprisonment to which Beethoven's deafness confined him. This is a fanciful description, but few people have had a deeper knowledge of Beethoven's quartets. The sketches for this movement also show the repeated note theme that ends up as the Allegretto of the Seventh Symphony, also in A minor and also dominated by a strong rhythmical line. In the quartet this is provided by the inspired *pizzicato* in the cello, the foundation of the movement's plaintive melancholy.

The third movement is a relaxed minuet harking back to Mozart again, a gracious and stylised dance reminiscent of the rococo era. The Trio is more dynamic and forceful with some spectacular decorations. This easeful interlude is doubtless intended as a contrast to the irresistible force of the fugal finale, which explodes upon us like a whirlwind. It develops into a near *moto perpetuo* that is a virtuoso showpiece for the players, and its high spirits display Beethoven's energetic mastery of the medium. FH

**Seán Doherty** [b. 1987]

**String Quartet No.3 'The Devil's Dream'** [2015]

I was introduced to music through the fiddle tradition of my native Donegal. The tradition is distinctive in Ireland: not like the languid lilt of the Clare style nor the light patter of the Galway style, the Donegal style looks outwards, across the sea, for its closest kin — to Scotland and to Nova Scotia. Aggressive, driving, and un-ornamented, the tunes are as stark as the bogland, the bowing as jagged as the cliffs. A leading exponent of this tradition was my teacher, the fiddle player James Byrne and this string quartet is loosely based on two tunes that I learned from his playing: An Londubh and The Devil's Dream.

James died on his walk home from a seisiún in the early hours of 8 November 2008 near his home in Míin na Croise. This piece imagines this walk. Half-remembered fragments of the slow air, An Londubh, slowly coalesce until its full form is reached, into which the reel, The Devil's Dream, intrudes as a danse macabre that demolishes the air. The air comes, screaming, back, only to be subsumed by the reel once more. After a quotation of the plainchant *Dies irae*, the reel itself disintegrates. From the ashes of the Devil's Dream, the air emerges in its final, transfigured, form. This piece is written in memory of James Byrne [1946–2008] and for his partner Connie, and their daughters, Séana, Aisling, and Merle. *Seán Doherty*

**Dmitri Shostakovich [1906-1975]**

**Quartet No 2 in A major Op. 68 [1944]**

This quartet was the last of Shostakovich's war pieces, which began with the famous Leningrad Symphony with Hitler's armies at the gates, the Eighth Symphony of 1943 and the E minor Piano Trio, which was finished in August 1944. Shostakovich then turned as though diabolically possessed to this Quartet. The two chamber works were written in mourning for his friend, Ivan Sollertinsky, though the Quartet was dedicated to his fellow composer and another loyal friend, Vissarion Shebalin. (In those testing times loyal friends were frighteningly scarce.) Both works were premiered at the same concert in the Great Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonic, where Sollertinsky had been artistic director.

It was while writing this work that Shostakovich wrote to Shebalin worrying about the lightning speed at which he composed: *One shouldn't compose as quickly as I do. Composition is a serious business...It is exhausting, rather unpleasant, and at the end of the day you lack any confidence in the result. But I can't rid myself of the bad habit.*

The difference from his first Quartet is staggering, the slow movement alone is almost as long the whole of the earlier work and the mood of sorrow and lamentation is overwhelming. The wild howl of protest that begins this A major Quartet propels the music straight into orbit, a momentum that the strident second theme continues without any let-up in the tension. This short and powerful exposition is repeated before the development is begun in a deceptively restrained manner. This seems to circle around the central drama before driving itself to a desperate climax. The opening cry then leads back into an exhausted recapitulation but manages to revive itself for the coda's last wild outburst.

The dramatic world of opera is conjured by the movement titles, moving from Overture to Recitative and Romance when the first violin plays the heroine. After his catastrophic confrontation with Stalin over *Lady Macbeth*, he never again had the confidence to complete a full-length opera, so his dramatic talents had to find other means of expression. The instrumental recitative is also a reminder of Beethoven's late quartets, and the tragic posture betrays the more Russian influence of Tchaikovsky, but the voice in the desert is Shostakovich's alone. The chorale-like supporting voices become stronger after the passionate climax at the heart of the movement while the violin's lament scarcely falters. The Waltz of the third movement has been called a dance of death with its wild fluctuations of tempo and air of muted menace.

The *Adagio Finale* returns to the theme and variations of the second movement of the First Quartet but on a vastly increased scale. The theme itself is preceded by an expansive and sonorous introduction, which is to return to play a dramatic role near the end. The theme starts innocuously but is gradually transformed by a progressive acceleration of tempo into such an intense excitement, that you forget the movement began as an Adagio. Eventually the theme returns *cantabile* before the dramatic intervention of the introduction and a final robust statement of the theme.

*Francis Humphrys*

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