

THE VANBRUGH & FRIENDS

Keith Pascoe and Marja Gaynor, violins

Simon Aspell and Ed Creedon, violas

Christopher Marwood, cello - Stéphane Petiet, double bass

CASTLECONNELL – Tuesday 29th November at 8pm - All Saints' Church
presented by Limerick Arts Office

Johannes Brahms [1833-1897]

String Quintet No.2 in G major Op.111 [1890]

- 1. Allegro non troppo, ma con brio*
- 2. Adagio*
- 3. Un poco Allegretto*
- 4. Vivace ma non troppo presto*

Antonín Dvořák [1841 – 1904]

String Quintet in G major Op.77 [1875]

- 1. Allegro con fuoco*
- 2. Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Trio: L'istesso tempo, quasi allegretto*
- 3. Poco andante*
- 4. Finale: Allegro assai*

THE VANBRUGH

The Vanbrugh has evolved from the work of the Vanbrugh Quartet which was based in Cork as RTE's Resident Quartet from 1986 to 2013 and as Artists-in-Residence at University College, Cork from 1990 until the retirement of violinist Gregory Ellis in 2017. Over three decades the quartet gave close to three thousand concerts, presenting the chamber music repertoire to audiences throughout Ireland, Europe, the Americas, and the Far East. Commercial recordings include more than thirty CDs of repertoire ranging from the complete Beethoven quartets to many contemporary Irish works. In 2016 the group was presented with the National Concert Hall's Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of their contribution to music in Ireland.

Keith Pascoe, Simon Aspell, and Christopher Marwood continue to perform together as the nucleus of the Vanbrugh and are joined by guest artists for performances of a wide range of chamber music repertoire.

Marja Gaynor, violin

Originally from Finland, Marja Gaynor is a Cork-based violinist and viola player. She specialises in Baroque music and is a member of Irish Baroque Orchestra and Camerata Kilkenny, recording and touring with both groups regularly. She has also performed with Irish Chamber Orchestra, Ensemble Marsyas, Dunedin Consort, London Handel Players, King's Consort and Helsinki Baroque Orchestra. Marja is known as a versatile musician at home in many different styles, a fluent improviser, as well as arranger and curator. Her string arranging credits include Oscar-winning song "Falling Slowly" from the movie *Once*, and Marja is also a long time member of the cult band Interference. Upcoming projects include chamber music tours with Solas Quartet and The Vanbrugh and performing and arranging as a trio with uilleann piper David Power and flamenco guitarist John Walsh. She teaches violin and chamber music in MTU Cork School of Music.

Ed Creedon, viola

Ed Creedon enjoys a varied career as a viola player, performing chamber music, in recitals and as an orchestral musician. Recent performances include the National Concert Hall Chamber Music Gathering, tours throughout Ireland with the Lir String Quartet, tours to Finland, France and India with Camerata Ireland as well as solo performances with Camerata Ireland and Barry Douglas.

Chamber music highlights include performances with the Vanbrugh Quartet, as well as appearances with the Ficino Ensemble in Dublin, the Piatti Quartet in the U.K., at the Ortús Festival in Cork, and repeat invitations to the Clandeboye Festival in Belfast and the Killaloe Festival of Chamber Music. For four consecutive summers he took part in the West Cork Chamber Music Festival's Young Musicians Programme.

Ed comes from Cork and studied with Constantin Zanidache and Simon Aspell at the Cork School of Music.

Stéphane Petiet, double bass

Stéphane Petiet, born in 2000, began attending double bass lessons in DIT (now TUD) with Waldemar Kozak in 2004, shortly before his 5th birthday. After almost 8 years of lessons, he began to study part-time under David Whitley in the Cork School of Music, from 2012 to present, starting the BMus degree in 2018.

Stéphane played with numerous youth orchestras, including the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland, Ulster Youth Orchestra, and the Wiener Jeunesse Orchester (Vienna Youth Orchestra), encompassing multiple tours through countries such as Amsterdam, Austria and Romania. More recently he has worked with the National Symphony Orchestra, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, the Ulster Orchestra, Camerata Ireland, and the Cork Opera House Concert Orchestra.

Solo achievements include winning the 2022 CSM Advanced Recital Competition, being runner-up in the 2022 Irish Freemasons Young Musician of the Year and a silver medal in the 2023 Feis Ceoil Aileen Gore Cup. He was a recipient of the MTU Arts Office Bursary in 2022.

Upcoming projects include a tour of the US with Camerata Ireland in March 2024 and a solo recital as part of the Cork Orchestral Society 2023-2024 season.

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 can be downloaded from nsqf.ie if needed.



PROGRAMME NOTES

Johannes Brahms [1833-1897]

String Quintet No.2 in G major Op.111 [1890]

Vienna's Prater was, in the nineteenth century, a four-mile long wooded park dotted with cafés and beer gardens and restaurants. Brahms, like Beethoven and Schubert before him, relaxed there and listened to music from the little orchestras and the gypsy bands. Brahms' apartment was within ten paces of the Prater, where he over the years became a well-known figure. Max Kalbeck, who was a member of Brahms' inner circle from 1880, and later his first biographer, exclaimed on first hearing the opening of this magisterial quintet: *'Brahms in the Prater!'* Brahms replied: *'You've got it,'* and added with a roguish grin: *'And all the pretty girls there!'* It is likely that Brahms was pulling his leg, but the idea is a good one.

The opus number is significant for it is the same number as Beethoven's final piano sonata. Brahms had spent most of his life fighting Beethoven's giant shadow; now suddenly he was tired, and Opus 111 seemed a significant milestone. The proposal for a quintet came from Joachim, who requested a companion for Op.88, though it was actually premiered by the Rosé Quartet, who were also to premiere quartets by Schönberg, Pfitzner, Reger and Weigl. As soon as Joachim saw the opening bars he told Brahms it would take three cellists in one to make the line heard above the thunderous accompaniment. Joachim was right, of course, and Brahms actually sketched a less massive alternative, but in the end he let the opening stand and bequeathed discomfort to cellists forever.

Brahms strolling in the Prater would appear to call for music every bit as grandiose as Musorgsky's description of himself at Hartman's memorial exhibition nearly twenty years earlier; both composers were aware of their significance. The opening of the quintet is truly superb as the cello melody strides out beneath the symphonic grandeur of the tremolo in the upper strings. Unlike the first quintet, there is no transition theme before the lyrical and waltz-like second subject is reached. However the tremolandi from the first subject begin to invade before the end of the exposition, which is repeated as usual. The start of the development is mesmerising, as pianissimo whisperings – derived from the movement's opening tremolo – are mingled with wisps of the second subject. The remainder of this section makes much of the full-blooded opening, and the recapitulation is reached without a break in the tension. The coda looks seriously at the possibility of a gentle conclusion, but in the end Brahms cannot resist a final flourish.

The dark beauty of the adagio is a complete contrast, dominated as it is by the husky voice of the viola sighing over a hushed and ambiguous harmonic background, with plaintive pizzicatos to maintain momentum. Brahms is surely echoing the exotic gypsy bands that haunted the Prater with their night music for violin, cimbalom and bass. The central outburst is heralded by a mysterious sequence that almost fades into silence before the passionate climax. This culminates in a cadenza for the first viola, unknowingly anticipating a similar moment in the clarinet quintet.

The third movement is equally restrained, as though Brahms is creating an introspective counterweight for the extrovert outer movements. It is a reflective dance in G minor led by the first violin, leading into a graceful G major dance for the trio. The overwhelming impression of the finale is the dizzy abandon of the coda, but the build-up is achieved with Brahms' usual subtlety. The first subject contrasts a scampering semiquaver idea with a more boisterous foot-stamping dance. These make way for a brief second subject of violin solo against a shimmering background with offbeat pizzicatos. The development and most of the recapitulation is driven by the energetic semiquavers as the working out becomes more brilliant. The reappearance of the second subject allows the momentum to dissolve momentarily into pianissimo, before the hectic coda takes over. *Francis Humphrys*

Antonín Dvořák [1841 – 1904]

String Quintet in G major Op.77 [1875]

Dvořák wrote his Quintet for two violins, viola, cello and double bass in 1875, and it is an unusual combination for the period. The double bass has a supporting role that allows the cello to play in a more lyrical vein, and the increased strength of the bass line creates an almost orchestral effect with the violins and viola above them. Dvořák himself was a fine viola player, which is reflected in his outstanding writing for strings, and it is not surprising that his first official opus number was a string quintet with two violas.

This quintet is one of his early works and should have been published as his Op.18, but the publisher made a mistake and published it as Op.77. It dates from the end of a transitional phase in his compositional career and was written in the same year that he was granted an Austrian State stipendium for artists. Brahms was on the jury and, as well as supporting Dvořák's applications for grants on this and many subsequent occasions, he also recommended Dvořák's music to his own publisher, Simrock in Berlin. Simrock accepted the *Moravian Duets* for piano in 1877 and commissioned the *Slavonic Dances* for piano duet. A critic wrote such an enthusiastic review of the *Slavonic Dances* in a Berlin newspaper that there was a *positive assault on the sheet music shops*, and the previously unknown Czech composer found that his name was made literally in the course of a day. He was besieged by requests from German publishers and at the end of 1878 his compositions had begun to be played in international concert halls.

In 1873 Dvořák re-assessed his compositional style and began to move away from modern German influence, turning to a more classical style (equal phrase lengths, repetition, traditional thematic development and conventional modulations) which contained elements of Slavonic folklore, of which he had made a special study. In effect, *national rather than Wagnerian*, as he himself said.

In its original form the Quintet had five movements, the second of which was an Intermezzo, *Andante religioso*. However, he decided that two slow movements would be too much and he removed the Intermezzo and published it as a separate piece. The Quintet's first and last movements could work excellently as operatic overtures if they were orchestrated – a reminder that despite his prolific output of chamber music, Dvořák was an enthusiastic opera composer, who regarded opera as central to his work. The Quintet was the most original work he had written so far, and it is captivating. Dvořák himself was aware of his achievement and he entered it in a chamber music contest, which it won, and submitted it as one of his works with his next application for the State grant. The vigorous, ebullient scherzo is followed by one of Dvořák's loveliest slow chamber music movements. It unfolds into a sweeping song of captivating emotional charm and unusual beauty. The last movement is a rondo with two themes that recall the first movement. There are some brisk polka rhythms, not surprising in a work which the composer inscribed *to my country*. *Sarah M. Burn*

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