

THE VANBRUGH & FRIENDS

Keith Pascoe and Marja Gaynor, violins
Simon Aspell and Ed Creedon, violas
Christopher Marwood and Maria O'Connor, cellos

YOUGHAL - Saturday 11th February at 2pm - The Mall Arts Centre
LIMERICK - Sunday 12th February at 3.30pm - University Concert Hall

Ludwig van Beethoven [1770-1827]

String Quintet in C major, Op. 29, 'Storm' [1801]

1. *Allegro moderato*
2. *Adagio molto espressivo*
3. *Scherzo. Allegro – Trio*
4. *Presto*

Pyotr Tchaikovsky [1840-1893]

String Sextet in D minor Op.70 'Souvenir de Florence' [1890-92]

1. *Allegro con spirito*
2. *Adagio cantabile e con moto*
3. *Allegretto moderato*
4. *Allegro vivace*



LIVING YOUGHAL



LIMERICK CLASSICAL
CONCERT SERIES

THE VANBRUGH

The Vanbrugh has evolved from the work of the Vanbrugh Quartet which was based in Cork as RTÉ's Resident Quartet from 1986 to 2013 and as UCC's Artists-in-Residence 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. For this concert the core members of the Vanbrugh, Keith Pascoe, Simon Aspell and Christopher Marwood, welcome three wonderful colleagues, violinist Marja Gaynor, violist Ed Creedon and cellist Maria O'Connor

Marja Gaynor, violin

Marja Gaynor was born in Finland but has been based in Cork since 2005. She was awarded a 1st class honours MA at Cork School of Music, and continued her Baroque violin studies at The Royal Conservatoire of The Hague with Pavlo Beznosiuk.

Marja is a member of the Irish Baroque Orchestra and Camerata Kilkenny. Both ensembles have released much-acclaimed recordings and toured nationally and internationally. Marja is also a founder member of Giordani Quartet, Ireland's only chamber group specialising in early Classical repertoire using period instruments. Outside Ireland Marja works with the Helsinki Baroque Orchestra and other leading European period orchestras, and is increasingly in demand as a leader, soloist and workshop facilitator. She was the Artistic Director of East Cork Early Music Festival 2013-2015, and has also been invited to act as guest curator for the Kaleidoscope Night concert series.

With her various areas of interest and expertise (Baroque, traditional music, and improvisation) Marja is much sought after as an arranger, studio musician and collaborator in all genres. Her proudest project to date was her critically acclaimed arrangement of Purcell's 'Dido and Aeneas' (Cork Opera House), and she also arranged and played the strings of 'Falling Slowly' for the movie 'Once', Oscar winner for best song in 2008.

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 Clondeboy 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.

Maria O'Connor, cello

Cellist Maria O'Connor holds both a B.Mus and an MA from the MTU Cork School of Music. She was a prize winner in numerous competitions including Feis Ceoil, Feis Maitiu and the CSM Concerto and Chamber Music Competition. During her studies she was a guest soloist with the CSM Symphony Orchestra.

As cellist with the Chiral Quartet, Maria was awarded the 2014 CSM Directors Prize. The quartet were subsequently named Ensemble in Residence at CSM. They were winners of the CSM RTE Vanbrugh Quartet

Chamber Music Competition, the KBC Great Music in Irish Houses Residency competition and the Music in Drumcliffe Strings Attached Competition and studied with both the Vogler Quartet and the Vanbrugh Quartet. Maria has performed in numerous venues and festivals at home and abroad including the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, Killaloe Music Festival, the Music in Drumcliffe festival and in the RDS Rising Stars recital series, the Jeuneusses Musicales Festival and at Guildhall, London.

Since completing her studies, Maria has enjoyed a diverse career as a chamber musician, orchestral player and teacher. She is currently principal cellist with the Irish Memory Orchestra and has toured with them in both Ireland and abroad. As a freelance cellist she also plays with Cello Ireland, the RTÉ Concert Orchestra and the Kerry Scotia Ensemble.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Ludwig van Beethoven [1770-1827]

String Quintet in C major, Op. 29, "Storm" [1801]

1. Allegro moderato
2. Adagio molto espressivo
3. Scherzo. Allegro – Trio
4. Presto

When Beethoven composed his only full-length string quintet in 1801, he was beginning a transition between his early and middle stylistic phases, moving from Classical mastery towards a new kind of epic innovation that would define his mature artistry. The years of 1801-1802 witnessed Beethoven confronting the ironic and devastating fate of losing his hearing, eventually prevailing with heroic resolve. This transitional period finds Beethoven composing his second symphony, his third piano concerto and the marvelous Op. 29 String Quintet known by the nickname "Storm" (Der Sturm). Overshadowed by the fame of his string quartets and the string quintets of Mozart and Schubert, Beethoven's quintet is rarely performed, a special treat to encounter. It is a large-scale work leveraging the great skills Beethoven honed writing his previous string trios and quartets and, like Mozart's quintets, features an expansive richness due to the sonority and independence of the lower strings enhanced with a second viola.

The first movement is a full-featured sonata form with two themes (the second in an unusual key), a surging development and a recap with elegant decorations. The second movement is a characteristically lyrical and noble slow movement with a surprising depth of feeling, more poignant and intense than many commentators reveal. The scherzo is brisk and vital, famously based on a brief, single measure leaping motif that saturates all but the contrast of the luscious trio. The finale inspired the quintet's nickname: over the stormy tremolos in the lower strings, the first violin soars like a bird against gale force winds. Adding to the stormy complexion is a dramatic *fugato* and Beethoven's famous muscularity in the lower strings. But Beethoven also displays his rough humor with some surprising musical jokes he most likely learned from Haydn.

Pyotr Tchaikovsky [1840-1893]

String Sextet in D minor Op.70 [1890-92]

1. *Allegro con spirito*
2. *Adagio cantabile e con moto*
3. *Allegretto moderato*
4. *Allegro vivace*

Tchaikovsky lived an incredibly restless life, forever wanting to be where he was not and forever travelling in search of a goal he could never reach, not unlike Schubert's famous Wanderer. As soon as a work had been written and premiered, he would wash his hands of it and flee to another city or country retreat or even another country. So after the premiere of *Sleeping Beauty*, he fled from Moscow to Europe, ending up in Florence, where he set about composing the *Queen of Spades*. He completed this remarkably quickly and then returned to Russia to orchestrate it.

Despite being totally exhausted by this enormous creative effort, he immediately turned to honouring a four-year-old commission for a string sextet from the St Petersburg Chamber Music Society. He found this very hard going, the problem being *not a lack of ideas, but the complexity of the form, there must be six independent yet compatible voices*. Nonetheless the work was finished in less than six weeks, though he later revised it after an unsuccessful first performance.

There is almost nothing Italian about the work except that he outlined the Adagio theme while he was in Florence. The first movement had two contrasting ideas; a vigorous, rhythmically dominating first subject and a more submissive and lyrical second subject. However the tension in the movement comes from the sense of the writing straining at the limitations of the form. Tchaikovsky claimed that he felt he was writing for a string orchestra and then arranging it for six solo instruments, so it is doubly curious that the string orchestra version has none of the charm and immediacy of the chamber version.

The justly famous Adagio opens with some forbidding chords before the gorgeous tune steals in on the first violin above a pizzicato raindrop accompaniment. Tchaikovsky unashamedly milks his theme for every teardrop he can get. There's a brief shuddering central section after which the theme returns to huge effect in the cello before being joined by the violin. The coda is most moving for as the end approaches, every last note becomes more precious as the theme is gradually swamped by the raindrops.

The Scherzo begins gently, but once the motto theme has been announced it soon warms up and becomes almost aggressive and even the hugely energetic Trio is swallowed up as soon as the Scherzo theme returns. At the end he uses Beethoven's old trick of pretending to repeat the Trio and then foiling your expectation with a single resounding chord. The contrapuntal finale really does try to take upon itself the mantle of a full string band as the six voices combine individually and collectively in a triumphant blaze of sound.

Francis Humphrys

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