

THE VANBRUGH & FRIENDS

Keith Pascoe and Marja Gaynor, violins

Simon Aspell and Ed Creedon, violas

Christopher Marwood, cello

CORK UCC - Friday 24th March at 1.10pm - Aula Maxima, UCC

NEWBRIDGE - Friday 24th March at 8pm - Riverbank Arts Centre

BANDON - Saturday 25th March at 8pm - Bandon Methodist Church

DONERAILE - Sunday 26th March at 3pm - The Convent Theatre

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*

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*



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 two wonderful colleagues, violinist Marja Gaynor and violist Ed Creedon.

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.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Ludwig van Beethoven [1770-1827]

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

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.

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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

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