

NATIONAL STRING QUARTET FOUNDATION - AUTUMN SEASON 2021

THE VANBRUGH

Keith Pascoe and Katherine Hunka, violins

Simon Aspell and David Kenny, violas

Christopher Marwood, cello

**The Inkwel Theatre, Tracton Arts and Community Centre
Saturday 2nd October 2021 at 8pm**

Wolfgang Mozart [1756-1791]

String Quintet in C major K.515

1. Allegro
2. Andante
3. Menuetto - Allegretto
4. Allegro

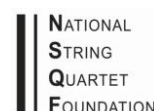
Johannes Brahms [1833-1897]

String Quintet No.1 in F major Op.88

1. Allegro non troppo ma con brio
2. Grave ed appassionato
3. Allegro energico



**Cork
County Council**
Comhairle Contae Chorcaí



THE VANBRUGH

The Vanbrugh has evolved from the work of the legendary Vanbrugh Quartet. 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 Katherine Hunka and violist David Kenny

KATHERINE HUNKA, VIOLIN

Born in London, Katherine Hunka grew up under the musical guidance of teacher Sheila Nelson. She performed chamber music at London's South Bank and the Royal Albert hall, was soloist with the City of London Sinfonia and led the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

Katherine has been Leader of the Irish Chamber Orchestra since 2002 and regularly directs from the leader's chair. As director and soloist with the ICO she has toured Germany, China and Singapore, appeared at the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, and more recently, at the Kilkenny Arts Festival.

Katherine directs ICO national tours, which take the orchestra all over Ireland and enjoys collaboration with contemporary composers. She has directed premieres with many Irish composers. As leader, she has also enjoyed performing solo concertos and chamber music with Jörg Widmann, Pekka Kuusisto, Anthony Marwood and Nigel Kennedy amongst others.

Katherine performs regularly as a chamber musician and soloist at festivals throughout Ireland and the UK. At the Aldeburgh Festival she premiered Benjamin Britten's rediscovered Double Concerto. She has been a regular at the West Cork Chamber Music Festival and the Killaloe festival. Her trio Far Flung, with accordionist Dermot Dunne and bassist Malachy Robinson, delights audiences with its light-hearted approach, their repertoire spanning from Bach to Klezmer with anything in between. They have recently released their first album.

Katherine has been a guest leader with the Manchester Camerata, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. She has also been guest soloist with the RTE National Symphony Orchestra and Concert Orchestra. She is currently a Professor at the CIT Cork School of Music and the Irish World Academy of Music.

DAVID KENNY, VIOLA

A native of Cork, David Kenny studied with Constantin Zanidache and Simon Aspell at the CIT Cork School of Music. He has worked with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Wexford Festival Opera Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra, John Wilson Orchestra and the Irish Chamber Orchestra. He has played Principal Viola with the European Union Youth Orchestra and the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland. In 2016, David was appointed to the viola section of the RTÉ Concert Orchestra.

He has performed at the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, Music in Drumcliffe and the Interlaken Classics Festival. He has collaborated with the Ficino Ensemble, Musici Ireland and the Vanbrugh Quartet. As violist with the Shandon String Trio he undertook a Chamber Studio mentorship under Richard Lester at Kings Place, London, last year.

He has participated in masterclasses with Yuri Bashmet, Nobuko Imai, Bruno Giuranna, Maxim Rysanov, Lawrence Power and with members of the Alban Berg, Vanbrugh, Pacifica, Artemis, Vogler, Danel, Danish and Casals Quartets.

Programme Notes

Wolfgang Mozart [1756-1791]

String Quintet in C major K.515

The early spring of 1787 was a busy time for Mozart. He was working on a commission for his new opera, *Don Giovanni*, his father was slowly dying in Salzburg, Mozart himself was not well, he moved house, the young Beethoven arrived on his doorstep looking for instruction and he wrote the two miraculous quintets in C major and G minor back to back. Historians have interpreted the house moving in two diametrically opposed ways. He moved from his elegant but very expensive city centre apartment to a spacious house with a large garden in a quiet suburb. Some Mozart scholars follow Leopold Mozart in immediately assuming the worst, namely that Mozart had been overspending and needed to retrench by moving to less expensive lodgings. Others have argued persuasively that Mozart no longer needed the large city centre apartment that he took on at the height of the success of his subscription concerts when he needed space for his assistants and copyists who helped keep the music flowing for the torrent of concerts. Instead a quiet district and a large garden may have seemed attractive with a young child, another on the way and his own indifferent health. Whatever the answer, the majestic, outgoing C major Quintet was written in the old apartment and the tragic, inward-looking G minor Quintet was the first product in the new house.

Music making in Vienna had changed since the height of Mozart's fame as a pianist and composer a few years earlier. The threat of the Turkish War and the Emperor's fiscal reforms had reduced the desire and the ability of the aristocracy to spend lavishly on orchestral concerts. Instead there was a growing bourgeoisie who liked to ape the aristocracy by promoting chamber music soirées and were prepared to pay both musicians and composer. Unfortunately Mozart's chamber music had become increasingly complex for this kind of audience and, hard though it is to believe, there were no subscribers for the set of three quintets in C major, G minor and C minor.

There is something indescribably joyful about the effortless mastery and bewitching beauty of this quintet. The opening cello theme and the violin's deft answer create a sense of serene spaciousness, as though an entire world existed inside those phrases. This is immediately turned upside down as the cello intriguingly becomes the answer instead of the question. The second group opens into a web of bewitching patterns that leads out to a gently murmuring figure which echoes the opening of Figaro's overture, though without the bustle.

The Andante is one of Mozart's sublime rhapsodies, an inspired dialogue between first violin and first viola. The other strings act as a discreet accompaniment, so openly spaced as to enhance the passages where they blend with the two leaders into the richness of the full quintet. In contrast the minuet is much more inward looking and darkly questioning as though suddenly uncertain of its direction. The trio, however, unveils sudden bursts of confidence and the craftsmanship throughout is so exquisite that no listener can remain unmoved. By darkening the minuet movement Mozart redoubles the effect of the buoyancy of the final sonata-rondo. This is one of those movements you wish would go on for ever and, indeed, Mozart must have known this as this is the longest single instrumental movement he ever wrote. He treats the enchanted opening melody with incredible diversity and brilliance at each of its returns. There is a mid-movement imitative episode, whose profound simplicities prefigure the inspired naïvety of *The Magic Flute*. This is music that restores one faith in the world, perhaps music to heal the broken-hearted. *Francis Humphrys*

Johannes Brahms [1833-1897]

String Quintet No.1 in F major Op.88

In the summer of 1882, Brahms was more than half tempted to go to Bayreuth for the premiere of Parsifal. However a typical diatribe in the *Bayreuth Blätter* against Bulow, an ex-Wagner conductor and Cosima's first husband, who had deserted to Brahms' camp, gave Brahms the excuse he needed to stay in Bad Ischl. Brahms and his new conductor-pianist had been touring a double-act with the two piano concertos, swapping places at podium and piano. The new concerto – *I have written a tiny, tiny piano concerto with a tiny, tiny wisp of a scherzo* – had been received rapturously almost everywhere. Brahms was being feted as never before, a composer at the height of his powers, even if his piano playing had deteriorated drastically. So instead of making the pilgrimage to Bayreuth, Brahms remained at Bad Ischl that summer and wrote the C major Piano Trio, *Gesang der Parzen* and the F major String Quintet.

Years earlier Brahms had written an F minor string quintet, which eventually metamorphosed into the great piano quintet. This early draft had followed Schubert's model with the two cellos, but this time he had enough confidence to follow in Mozart's footsteps with the two violas. He was particularly fond of Op.88: *you have never before had such a beautiful work from me*, he wrote to his publisher Simrock. Normally he was ironically deprecative of his music, so clearly this work stood high in his affections.

It is one of the least familiar of his chamber works, even though it begins with one of his most gorgeous melodies. This unfolds in leisurely fashion, a seemingly gentle and uncomplicated tune. This leads into an important and energetic transition theme in dotted rhythm before the lyrical second subject is introduced by one of the violas. The rhythmic complications of the second subject are aggressively taken up in the development, eventually driven forward to a big climax when the full sonority of the quintet is used to open the recapitulation. The sense of strain that can be felt in the quartets is here fully resolved with the extra viola. The coda is exquisite. And so is the slow movement. It is cast in five clearly defined sections, a main section that returns twice in varied form and two trios. The material is taken from two of his early neo-Baroque keyboard dances, a sarabande and a gavotte, completely reworked for strings. The sarabande equivocates between C sharp major and minor, and concludes with a haunting dying fall. The first trio is a delicate gigue-like allegretto vivace that turns out to be a variation of the presto gavotte that is the second trio. The third appearance of the sarabande sees new material being used with a new, more touching dying fall. The allegro energico brings the work back to life, with two abrupt chords leading straight into a vigorous fugue, which serves as a first subject of a sonata form structure. The second subject is a sweetened variation of the fugue subject on the first violin. The development combines both subjects with the fugal energy gradually taking over and leading into the recapitulation, which rather casts fugal discipline to one side. The coda takes off presto in 6/8, bringing the work to a powerful and genial conclusion. *Francis Humphrys*

The National String Quartet Foundation creates and sponsors projects which bring live chamber music to audiences throughout Ireland. It is committed to supporting musicians who wish to explore and perform the string quartet repertoire and to helping concert promoters present this rich and rewarding music. In addition to the support of its major funders, the Arts Council and RTÉ, the Foundation gratefully acknowledges the support of University College, Cork, Cork City Council and Cork County Council.

Please visit www.nsqf.ie for details of upcoming concerts and to sign up to the Foundation's mailing list

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