

# THE VANBRUGH & THE SPERO QUARTET

*PORTLAOISE - Friday 30th September at 8pm - Dunamaise Arts Centre*

*MINANE BRIDGE - Saturday 1st October at 8pm - Inkwel Theatre, Tracton Arts Centre*

*BANTRY - Sunday 2nd October at 3pm - St Brendan's Church - presented by West Cork Music*

## THE SPERO QUARTET

*Jennifer Murphy and Brigid Leman, violins - David Kenny, viola - Yseult Cooper Stockdale, cello*

**Wolfgang Mozart** [1756-1791]

**Quartet in D major K.499 'Hoffmeister'** [1786]

1. *Allegretto*
2. *Menuetto: Allegretto*
3. *Adagio*
4. *Allegro*

**Garth Knox** [b.1956]

**Satellites** [2015]

1. *Geostationary*
2. *Spectral Sunrise*
3. *Dimensions*

INTERVAL

## THE VANBRUGH

*Keith Pascoe and Brigid Leman, violins*

*Simon Aspell and David Kenny, violas*

*Christopher Marwood and Yseult Cooper-Stockdale, cellos*

**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*

## 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.

## THE SPERO QUARTET

**Jennifer Murphy** has performed in the Barbican Centre, London, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, Toronto, and the National Concert Hall, Ireland, and has had performances aired on BBC Radio (UK) and CBC (Canada). Recent solo engagements include a performance of the Korngold Violin Concerto conducted by Bramwell Tovey in Koerner Hall, Toronto, and Chausson's Poeme with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Ireland. Jennifer regularly performs in solo and chamber music recitals in Europe and North America, and has collaborated with David Geringas, Barry Shiffman, Ernst Kovacic, Steven Dann and Marc Ryser. Summer festival performances include the Music by the Sea Festival, the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, Domaine Forget Chamber Music Festival, and the Banff Centre Masterclasses.

**Brigid Leman** was born in Ottawa, Canada. She studied in San Francisco, Zurich and Weimar and from 2012 to 2019 held a contract position with the Hamburg State Opera in Germany under Simone Young and Kent Nagano. She has played as a regular guest in the Hamburg Symphony, the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra (Hamburg), the State Philharmonic Orchestra of Lübeck and the Århus Symphony in Denmark. In 2020 she moved to Ireland where she often plays in the RTÉ Concert Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra.

**David Kenny** studied with Constantin Zanidache and Simon Aspell at the CIT Cork School of Music and 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. An experienced chamber musician, David has performed at the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, Music in Drumcliffe Festival, Interlaken Classics Festival and has collaborated with the Ficino Ensemble, Musici Ireland and the Vanbrugh Quartet.

**Yseult Cooper Stockdale** studied in Cork, Dublin and Leipzig and enjoys a versatile career between the UK and Ireland. She has worked with both RTE orchestras, the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Welsh National Opera, Southbank Sinfonia and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. As chamber musician she has played in groups including the Vanbrugh, the Alberi Piano Trio, Musici Ireland, Crash Ensemble, Ficino Ensemble and London-based Scordatura Collective. She has a keen interest in exploring new music, and has performed over 50 premieres with Kirkos Ensemble.

## PROGRAMME NOTES

**Wolfgang Mozart** [1756-1791]

**Quartet in D major K.499 "Hoffmeister"** [1786]

Anton Hoffmeister [1754-1812] was a popular composer in Vienna and owner of a publishing company specialising in chamber music. A friend of Mozart, he published number of his works including this D Major Quartet, although he was later unsure of the wisdom of his decision as the public found the work too hard and refused to purchase it. Unlike other quartets issued in sets of six, this was a one-off score and the name of its publisher has long been attached to it. Perhaps it was a commission but there is little information available about its conception. Mozart completed the Quartet in August 1786 in Vienna, a couple of months after the première of Figaro.

The lengthy opening movement occupies almost half the Quartet's duration and has a suave elegance about it. The first theme contains all the material for the movement with Mozart fashioning a kind of second subject from a variation of the theme. Haydn had been creating monothematic movements at that time and perhaps Mozart was influenced by this. It is a finely crafted piece with remarkable canons and other polyphonic touches. It is the short, second movement Minuet which had brought most critical acclaim to the Quartet: Albert Einstein hailed it as unique, while Robbins Landon described it as one of the most original in 18th century music. The tune is a lusty country dance, more of a Ländler than a courtly Minuet, while the contrasting central section is a sparkling creation, described by Einstein as a piece of musical wizardry.

The slow movement is deeply moving with a sighing, amorous theme. It is one of Mozart's most personal statements, full of a deeply-felt emotion. In contrast the fourth movement is in Mozart's opera buffa style, as with a number of his Piano Concerto finales. An initially hesitant theme bursts into vigorous action and the movement whirls away, like an ensemble from some comic opera, full of felicitous moments and good cheer. *Ian Fox*

**Garth Knox** [b.1956]

**Satellites** [2015]

In space, the seemingly simple idea of standing still becomes a complex notion, demanding great precision and enormous effort, and is achievable only by travelling at great speed. In 'Geostationary', I wanted to capture this paradox in music, with always at least one instrument (usually the viola) in perpetual mechanical motion while the violins try to float their static melody, which never succeeds in leaving the starting note behind and falls back each time into the vacuum. At regular intervals their stationary orbit sweeps our four astronauts through a meteor shower where they are bombarded by high-energy micro-particles scattering in every direction.

'Spectral Sunrise' was inspired by hearing an astronaut talking on the radio about seeing sixteen sunrises per day when he was in the International Space Station, and the undiminishing wonder he felt each time at the searing intensity of the arriving light and the absolute darkness which followed its disappearance. I wanted to combine this idea with a form commonly used by baroque composers for a middle movement of three, sometimes just a few simple chords over which the players improvise. In this four-minute piece we hear three sunrises, each one followed by darkness illuminated only by a solo improvisation by one of the players. Before the last sunrise, there is a brief Spacewalk, which explores the comical side of trying to walk in a straight line in space.

'Dimensions' deals with the many possible dimensions which surround us, represented by the physical movements of the bow through space. In the first dimension, only vertical movement is possible. In the second, only horizontal movement along the string is possible. Then only circular motion, then alternating between the two sides of the bow (the stick and the hair). The fun really starts when we begin to mix the dimensions, slipping from one to another, and the piece builds to a climax of spectacular bow techniques including the 'whip' and the 'helicopter', producing a huge range of other-worldly sounds."

**Pyotr Tchaikovsky** [1840-1893]

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

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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