

FLINDERS QUARTET

& Schubert 2017

SCHUBERT IN THE SOUTH

St John's Anglican Church ~ Sunday 12 March, 2.00pm
Macedon Music ~ Sunday 19 March, 2.30pm
Salon, Melbourne Recital Centre ~ Thursday 23 March, 7.00pm
Montsalvat Barn Gallery ~ Sunday 26 March, 2.30pm

SHANE CHEN violin
NICHOLAS WATERS violin
HELEN IRELAND viola
ZOE KNIGHTON cello

Flinders Quartet dedicate these concerts to the memory of Betty Amsden AO DSJ. We will continue to be inspired by her for many years to come.

Schubert's 31 years on this earth were filled with music from a very early age. His innate gift for melody and song resulted in over 600 songs and it is this gift of melody, nostalgia and pure romance that connects the three composers on this program.

FRANZ SCHUBERT 1797-1828
String Quartet No. 15 in G major, D.887 (composed 1826)

- I. Allegro molto moderato
- II. Andante un poco moto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace - Trio: Allegretto
- IV. Allegro assai

Schubert started writing string quartets at the age of thirteen whilst he was at school, so it's no surprise that by the age of 29 he had already written his fifteenth string quartet. A work on the same scale as *Ben Hur* or *Gone with the Wind*, its architecture and harmonic scale has made it one of the monoliths of the repertoire.

As a child, Schubert was taught violin by his father (Theodore) and brother (Ignaz) making it impossible to escape the family musical string quartet evenings. On such an occasion, he adopted the viola position, which provided him an invaluable insight to the inner workings of the sixteen-stringed instrument (i.e. the string quartet). Whilst trying to find his way as a composer, Franz found himself teaching with his father and became increasingly frustrated.

Constantly plagued by a poor financial position, illness and the struggle for recognition, Schubert still managed to exhibit an optimism in his music. Indeed, this quartet's struggle between the major and minor tonalities mirror his own inward battles.

The quartet begins out of nothing. A major chord. As quickly as it starts, it crescendos to an almighty crashing minor chord. Then a plea for help. Once again, the music tries to break from the minor chord with no luck. Over a shimmering tremolo, we hear what could well be the

introduction to an opera and indeed, there are many heroines, heroes and great drama to come. This opening foretells an ominous battle. A feature of Schubert's work is his ingenious approach to harmonic development and this is certainly shown in the first section. After we find ourselves in F sharp major - so close, yet so far from G major - we are justly rewarded with the signature tune from this movement. A tune that is repeated no less than seven times, and each time with a different accompaniment.

The second movement is testament to his gift of song and one is reminded of a famous Schubert quote: "I am composing as a God, as if it simply had to be done as it has been done." The movement begins in a minor mode for a mere two bars before continuing its lament in B major and the search for harmonic meaning is certainly not over. The dotted figure from the first movement returns with the plea for help from the first movement turning into a mighty wail from the first violin and viola.

The third movement skitters around a Scherzo with the most divine romantic melody infusing the trio. Here, Schubert shows his prowess at constructing a counter melody that almost outshines the original.

In the last, epic marathon of a rondo movement, an architectural tour de force is as full of structural clues as the Egyptian pyramids. The players go on a round the world search to find the inner meaning behind the struggle of major and minor. Yet again, Schubert plays with the tonality shift in a very short time - this time, only one bar is heard in minor before the major reigns supreme. The syncopated harmonic progressions are doubled in length as they are heard throughout the movement, constantly searching before finally reaching the joyful conclusion that the jury has ruled in favour of major. Full of the lightness of a guilt free conscience, the group skip gaily off into the distance.

INTERVAL (15 mins)

CALVIN BOWMAN 1972-

String Quartet in two movements (composed 2017)

Commissioned for Flinders Quartet by Julian Burnside AO QC

Calvin Bowman has earned his reputation as the 'Schubert of the South' through his own collection of songs, now numbering over eighty. The first Australian to graduate from the University of Yale with a Doctorate of Musical Arts, he has worked with many of Australia's leading ensembles and gained international notoriety with his song *Now Touch the Air Softly*, recorded by Emma Matthews with the Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra for Deutsche Grammophon.

"As a composer, I have been described as a 'radical conservative' on more than one occasion. I wear this moniker as a badge of honour whilst being fully cognizant of the fact that it carries great responsibilities."

Bowman has been much influenced by the English pastoralists and his beloved Bach. His art songs have been lauded for their careful craftsmanship and beauty. He is a laureate of the Ned Rorem Award for Song Composition, the Diana Barnhart American Song Competition, and the English Poetry and Song Society Artsong Award.

Bowman has been closely associated with Flinders Quartet since its inception; most notably for his commission *Homage to Mozart* included on the group's first commercial release, *Reinventions*. His song cycle *The Curly Pyjama Letters* with spoken voice was premiered with Vince Jones in 2012 and will be recorded and released in the near future.

Bowman's first string quartet has been in planning for many years. With the idea planted by Julian Burnside after the success of *The Curly Pyjama Letters* nearly five years ago, Flinders Quartet is incredibly privileged to have the opportunity to premiere such an important work.

Bowman writes:

"My String Quartet has been a long time coming. I feel the weight of history in this medium more than any other."

The piece is in two movements. The first is in so-called sonata form. The second is divided into two sections, the first of which is a brooding 'Nocturne'. The second is a set of six variations based on an original theme."

CARLOS GUASTAVINO 1912-2000

El Sampedrino originally for voice and piano, arranged for string quartet by Iain Grandage

Vidala del secadal originally for voice and piano, arranged for string quartet by Iain Grandage

Romance Argentinos for two pianos, Op. 2, No. 1 Las Niñas de Santa Fe arranged for string quartet by John Rotar

Known by many as the 'Schubert of the Pampas', Carlos Guastavino is to Argentina what Schubert is to Austria.

As revealed in a 1968 interview, chamber music better reflected his personality. Guastavino said:

"You know why? I express myself better in chamber works. In addition, I am not pretentious, you see? I adore singing and when I see a verse, I feel the music inside of me. There's a kind of automatic aesthetic conversion."

This tendency to work in the smaller form may be why Guastavino didn't enjoy the same degree of fame as other Argentine composers, Ginastera and Piazzolla. His idea of a successful song was one that people would sing in the streets without knowing who wrote it.

Despite having less international recognition than his compatriots, he was extremely popular in his home country and managed to survive almost solely on his royalties, needing very little additional income.

Guastavino was never swept up in the trends of composition or the need to be popular (which he most certainly was). When asked about twelve tone music or dodecaphony, he proclaimed:

"All of that is nonsense! I say it, I shout it to the whole world. Music, real music is harmony melody and rhythm, perfectly tonal. It's the only way to make music. The rest are hoaxes, they're lies."

Despite his home turf popularity, he suffered greatly at the hands of the critics and had a long period of silence and disillusionment from 1975 to 1987.

Guastavino wrote of his music:

"I write for everyone. Perhaps there is a nucleus of people I do not reach; they are the new composers, those young fellows who are following a new tendency."

When asked if he would be content if his music were not played he replied:

"No, No, I would be very sad because I would be a dead composer."

FLINDERS QUARTET

"I could hardly praise the playing of the Flinders Quartet more highly: accurate and perceptive with excellent timing and coordination." — BACHTRACK, March 2016

Flinders Quartet (FQ) is instantly recognisable as one of Australia's most loved chamber music ensembles. A quartet for the twenty-first century, Flinders continues its second decade with acknowledged musical skill and maturity. Their dynamic and stirring performances of a full spectrum of repertoire have audiences and critics articulating their esteem, and the quartet is now a highly respected force in Australian chamber music.

FQ regularly commissions and premieres works by Australian composers. In 2016, the quartet premiered works by Stuart Greenbaum and Elena Kats-Chernin, while Calvin Bowman and Iain Grandage commissions and arrangements are slated for 2017. In their ongoing mission to further the Australian tradition of chamber music, FQ has previously commissioned and premiered works by Katy Abbott, Ross Edwards, Richard Mills, Paul Dean, Paul Grabowsky, Andrew Ford, Ian Munro, Tom Henry and Peter Sculthorpe. In 2016, FQ launched its inaugural composer workshop initiative, working with emerging Australian composers.

Vanguards of the Melbourne chamber music scene, FQ initiated their own annual subscription series in 2002. The series has gained momentum each year, and the quartet now enjoys programming and presenting their own season in four Melbourne venues.

The quartet is regularly invited to perform and tour for chamber music presenters such as Musica Viva, and is in demand at festivals throughout Australia often in association with some of the country's finest talents, including Paul Dean, Kristian Chong, Ian Munro, Paul Dean, Karin Schaupp, Genevieve Lacey and Jayson Gillham. International engagements have taken them to the UK, Singapore, Canada, and most recently, Sweden and Finland, where they were invited to perform the complete string quartets by Sibelius.

FQ's 2017 performance schedule includes their annual Melbourne subscription series, a collaboration with celebrated cellist Timo-Veikko ('Tipi') Valve, and recitals and masterclasses in various parts of metropolitan and regional Australia.

Building on its 2006 Limelight Award and 2007 Melbourne Prize for Music nomination, FQ was nominated for a 2007 ARIA (Australian Recording Industry Association) award for its performance of Gillian Whitehead's *Bright Forms Return* in collaboration with new music ensemble Halcyon. In 2010, FQ was again nominated for the Melbourne Prize for Music, and in 2011 received an ARIA nomination for its CD release with Karin Schaupp (guitar), *Fandango*.

FQ was Radio 3MBS FM's inaugural Artists in Residence, a position they held until 2006. The quartet continues to receive regular airplay on that station, as well as on ABC Classic FM, Sydney's Fine Music FM, various other Australian stations, and on Finland's Radio Vega and the UK's BBC Three.

FQ's first commercial CD release, *Reinventions* with Genevieve Lacey, met with critical and popular acclaim and was re-released on the ABC Classics label in 2015, reaching #1 on the ARIA Core Classical Album Chart. Also on the ABC Classics label is their ARIA-nominated 2011 release, *Fandango*, with Karin Schaupp, and 2015 release *Intimate Voices: Sibelius String Quartets*. In 2017, FQ will record and release a CD of Australian works commissioned and/or premiered by the quartet.

"Their shading, rhythmic pliability and tautness of ensemble are impeccable." — LIMELIGHT MAGAZINE (reviewing "Intimate Voices"), December 2015

The members of Flinders Quartet have a steadfast commitment to the development of Australian chamber music, musicians and audiences. As teachers and mentors they regularly work with the Australian Youth Orchestra and its developmental programs for young chamber groups. They also work with the Victorian Amateur Chamber Music Society, and are regularly invited to tutor at secondary and tertiary institutions throughout Australia including the University of Melbourne.

flindersquartet.com

Want to get in touch with Flinders Quartet?
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T: 0417 798 523 Wendy Avilov, Manager

Visit flindersquartet.com for details of our next concerts:

Concerts with special guest **Timo-Veikko Valve** (cello),
featuring Schubert's much loved quintet for two cellos
HOBART Thu 15 June ~ **SYDNEY** Sun 18 June ~
HAWTHORN Tue 20 June

String quartet concerts
PENINSULA Fri 23 June ~ **BALLARAT** Sun 25 June ~
MELBOURNE Tue 27 June

CAPTURING THE NOW

Visit flindersquartet.com/giving to find out about **Capturing the Now**, our new initiative to nurture and grow Australian chamber music by supporting established and emerging composers through commissions, workshops, performances and recordings of new work. Until May 10th all donations received up to a total value of \$15,000 will be matched (doubling your investment) by Creative Partnerships Australia through their Plus1 initiative. We will use those funds to record some of the works commissioned for the quartet over our 17 year history. Please support this project if you can!

FLINDERS QUARTET

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