

FLINDERS QUARTET

COLLINS STREET SERIES - CONCERT 2

Tuesday 30 July 2019 ~ Collins Street Baptist Church, Melbourne

THIBAUD PAVLOVIC-HOBBA violin

NICHOLAS WATERS violin

HELEN IRELAND viola

ZOE KNIGHTON cello

RICHARD PIPER narration (pre-recorded)

THIS AFTERNOON'S PRE CONCERT:

Mia Kanda-Franklin (violin) and Alice Hurwood (cello) from the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS) performing Kodaly's Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7, movt I. Allegro serio, non troppo

We are going to let the music speak for itself today, but we wanted to share some wonderful news: Helen Ireland is expecting her second child in September, and we are sure you will join us in wishing her all the very best. Helen will be taking maternity leave from September until November; Tom Higham will be playing with us for our October concerts (details are on our website). We look forward to seeing you there.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH 1906-1975

Selected movements from the string quartets of Shostakovich, curated by Flinders Quartet with dramaturge and narrator, Richard Piper

- I. String Quartet No. 1 Op. 49, *movt 2 (excerpt)*
- II. String Quartet No. 2 Op. 68, *movt 2 Recitative and Romance: Adagio*
- III. String Quartet No. 3 Op. 73, *movt 1 Allegretto and 3 Allegro non troppo*
- IV. String Quartet No. 4 Op. 83, *movt 2 Andantino*
- V. String Quartet No. 5 Op. 92, *movt 1 Allegro non troppo*
- VI. String Quartet No. 6 Op. 101, *movt 3 Lento*
- VII. String Quartet No. 7 Op. 108, *movt 1 Allegretto*
- VIII. String Quartet No. 8 Op. 110, *movt 2 Allegro molto*
- IX. String Quartet No. 9 Op. 117, *movt 4 Adagio*
- X. String Quartet No. 10 Op. 118, *movt 2 Allegretto furioso*
- XI. String Quartet No. 11 Op. 122, *movt 3 Recitative: Adagio, movt 4 Etude: Allegro, movt 5 Humoresque: Allegro*
- XII. String Quartet No. 12 Op. 133, *movt 1 Moderato - Allegretto - Moderato - Allegretto - Moderato*
- XIII. String Quartet No. 13 Op. 138 *Doppio movimento (excerpt)*
- XIV. String Quartet No. 15 Op. 144, *movt 6 Epilogue: Adagio*

This program was inspired by Wendy Lesser's book "Music for Silenced Voices" which was given to the quartet as a present by long-time friend, Ian Godding. As we read the anecdotes, stories and memories from those who knew him, the personal nature of these works became like a photo album of those closest to Shostakovich.

A full cycle of Shostakovich's string quartets lasts anywhere between six and seven hours. In reading the book, it seemed such a succinct overview of his life, and we wanted to deliver that same experience in music. What would a 50-minute Shostakovich string quartet cycle sound like?

The stories (brilliantly brought to life by Julian Barnes' seemingly fictional, but for all intents and purposes, factual account of the life of Shostakovich in "The Noise of Time") involving the suitcase kept by his bed so he would not disturb the family should the authorities remove him in the middle of the night, and his children sitting in the treetops near their apartment with stones ready to pelt the authorities should they arrive, tell one aspect of his life and certainly validate the sense of fear that was constantly felt. Yet these string quartets

evidence Shostakovich's loyalty and the intense importance friendship and love played in his life. Perhaps these quartets were a saving grace as a vehicle of expression disallowed in his larger works. It is with this priority in mind that we embark on our journey. One of personal, rather than historical, significance.

The four members of the Beethoven Quartet were close allies and co-conspirators in Shostakovich's development of the string quartet genre. These four individuals were hugely responsible for this remarkable cycle.

Fyodor Druzhinin, who was the student of the Beethovens, was filling in at a certain time and describes the change in Shostakovich in the presence of his closest friends:

When he was amongst strangers especially if there were present people ill-disposed towards him, his critics, other composers, or simply someone he didn't know, his nervous tension never slackened. His body kept twitching, his mouth dropped dolefully, his lip trembled, and his eyes exuded such oppressive tragic energy that he was frightened to look at. But alone with the Beethovens he was a different person. He was calm but concentrated, ready to smile and joke.

A few years before his death, Shostakovich was quoted as saying:

You ask if I would have been different without Party Guidance? ... Yes, almost certainly. No doubt the line I was pursuing when I wrote the fourth symphony would have been stronger and sharper in my work. I would have displayed more brilliance, used more sarcasm, I could have revealed my ideas more openly instead of resorting to camouflage. I would have written more pure music.

It was this 'pure music' that he could explore in the string quartets.

We begin on the morning of Shostakovich's daughter's second birthday when he began work on the first string quartet. In his words, he said about the first quartet:

It didn't turn out particularly well - it's hard to compose well, one has to know how... Whilst composing my first string quartet, I tried to put over in it images of childhood and a slightly naive, sunny springtime atmosphere.

The second quartet is dedicated to Vissarion Shebalin. A dear friend who stood by him in the 'muddle instead of music' scandal following the premiere of his opera "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District".

The third string quartet is dedicated to the four members of the Beethoven Quartet. It was this quartet that the members of the Borodin Quartet (another quartet closely associated with the composer) had the audacity to suggest changes.

Shostakovich was famous for his resistance to suggestions, often quoting a Russian proverb: *What the pen has written, the axe cannot cut out.*

In January 1948, Shostakovich was summoned to a conference of composers where he was told that his music was Bourgeois, decadent with formalist tendencies. In what became known as the Zhdanov Decree, his music was likened to a piercing road drill or a musical gas chamber. The inevitable devastation was only softened by supportive friends.

After a terrifying phone call from Stalin himself, Shostakovich was forced into a delegation to America. It was here that he was made to listen while an interpreter gave a speech attacking Stravinsky with which he was made to agree. The one positive from the journey was the exposure to the string quartets of Bartok and if you listen for that influence, you will soon hear the Hungarian musical language creeping into Shostakovich's writing.

The fifth is dedicated to the players of the Beethoven Quartet. Shostakovich wrote on the score:

This quartet has been composed to mark the 30th anniversary of the Beethoven String Quartet and is dedicated to the artists, its members. Dear friends, please accept this modest gift as a testimony of my admiration of your wonderful art, of my deep gratitude for your splendid performance of my works and my great love for you all.

In December 1954, Shostakovich's beloved wife Nina (whom he had married, divorced and married again) had undergone surgery for a cancerous colon, but then collapsed into a coma. His daughter recalls that this was the first time she had seen her father cry. Nina was definitely his soulmate and true love.

For a long time after Nina's death he didn't write, but in 1956 he met and quickly married Margarita Kainova, a young party activist. She was universally disliked by his friends and family. Whatever the general consensus was about their relationship, the sixth quartet starts sunny and was written one month after their marriage. It is the third movement where we hear his mourning for his soulmate, Nina.

The eighth string quartet is the most loved and well known of the fifteen. The assertion that it is autobiographical stems from this letter to his friend, Glikman, which Shostakovich wrote whilst in Dresden, when he was meant to be working on film scores:

As hard as I tried to rough out the film scores which I am supposed to be doing, I still haven't managed to get anywhere. Instead I wrote this ideologically flawed string quartet which is of no use to anybody. I started thinking that if some day I die, nobody is likely to write a work in memory of me, so I had better write one myself. The title page could carry the dedication: To the memory of the composer of this quartet.

The thirteenth quartet highlights the viola and is dedicated to the original violist of the Beethovens, Vadim Borisovsky.

There is no escaping the sounds of jazz in the thirteenth string quartet. Apparently, Nikita Krushchev had been complaining about the unpleasant sounds he had heard at a recent jazz performance: *It is the kind of music that gives you a feeling of nausea and a pain in the stomach.*

The thirteenth quartet also uses col legno; in this case, tapping the bow on the body of the instrument. The Fitzwilliam Quartet (also close to Shostakovich) used other instruments to hit, they didn't want to damage their own. But perhaps that was Shostakovich's point - the act of inflicting pain on your own instruments. Apparently, Shostakovich joked that the first violinist must have a more expensive instrument than his colleagues: the first violinist is not called upon to do any tapping. Galina Shirinskaya said that she heard Shostakovich say that the col legno passage was to imitate the lash of a whip in a concentration camp. There is also the notion that it is the tapping of a nail into the coffin.

Shostakovich's fourteenth quartet hasn't been included in "our" cycle, but it was dedicated to the Beethoven Quartet cellist, Sergei Shirinsky. It is said he was a delightful man; big, bustling and kind. Sergei said after he had received this quartet, "Well I can die now". He was 70 at the time of the dedication, on to his third wife, his fifth child, so he couldn't give up. However, before the premiere of Shostakovich's fifteenth quartet, Sergei died of a heart attack, just after a day's rehearsals. Shostakovich was so impressed that he had literally been working until the hour of his death.

We have chosen to honour Sergei with the fifteenth quartet in E flat minor, which has no dedication.

The last movement of Shostakovich's last quartet quotes his viola sonata, in turn quoting Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata; as if aligning himself with the great string quartet composers in history. And rightly so.

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Today's concert references the following books and articles:

"Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and His Fifteen Quartets" by Wendy Lesser, published by Yale University Press
"Shostakovich: A Life Remembered" by Elizabeth Wilson, published by Faber Faber
"My hero: Dmitri Shostakovich" by Julian Barnes, published in The Guardian

Further recommended reading:

"Testimony: The Memoirs" by Dmitri Shostakovich, edited by Solomon Volkov
"The Noise of Time" by Julian Barnes

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