

FLINDERS QUARTET

FQ21

THIBAUD PAVLOVIC-HOBBA violin

WILMA SMITH violin

HELEN IRELAND viola

ZOE KNIGHTON cello

with RICHARD PIPER

BARTÓK, MY FATHER

SATURDAY 10 JULY, 6.30PM – PORT PHILLIP ESTATE

SUNDAY 11 JULY, 2.30PM - MONTSALVAT BARN GALLERY

THURSDAY 15 JULY, 7.00PM – MELBOURNE DIGITAL CONCERT HALL (online)

BÉLA BARTÓK 1881-1945

Duo for Two Violins No. 26 "Teasing Song"
Duo for Two Violins No. 27 "Limping Dance"

String Quartet No. 5

I. Allegro

II. Adagio

III. Molto Scherzo: alla bulgarese

IV. Andante

V. Finale: Allegro vivace

Duo for Two Violins No. 28 "Sorrow"

String Quartet No. 2

II. Allegro molto capriccioso

Bartók's six string quartets stand at the pinnacle of the canon alongside Beethoven, Shostakovich and Haydn. (Let's call them "le quatre".) You may well argue that Mozart, Dvorak, Schubert, Brahms and indeed Australia's own Sculthorpe (who wrote no less than 18 string quartets) plus many others need to be on the list as well and that may be so, but in each case "le quatre" challenged the form and structure of the string quartet and managed to change the course of composition. In fact, Bartók not only influenced the next generation of 'classical' or 'art' composers. Jimi Hendrix was also fascinated by the Bartók string quartets and a close listen to the harmonies used in "Purple Haze" will immediately remind you of the first movement of the fifth string quartet; and our very own Andrea Keller won an ARIA Award for Best Jazz Album with a set of improvisations on Bartók's mikrokosmos.

Throughout Bartók's six quartets, it is true that one can hear the harmonic discoveries as he found his own distinctive compositional voice. The constant tussle between minor and major and then the joyful slamming

of them together manufactured his own personal idea of tonality. This really stemmed from the music of Richard Strauss (whom he had admired intensely from a young age) and of Debussy (brought home from Paris by his lifelong friend and colleague, Zoltan Kodaly) and Bartók forged his own, new way of organising the twelve notes of the western scale as one musicologist put it, "daring harmonically, yet grounded in tradition."

The six quartets were written between 1909 and 1939, and like Beethoven and Shostakovich, represent his more personal offerings. The fifth string quartet which is featured today was written in 1934 and premiered on April 8th, 1935 in Washington, D.C., by the Kolisch Quartet. The structure of movements in this fifth quartet forms a glorious arch: fast-slow-scherzo-slow-fast. (The same structure was also used in the fourth quartet, the second Piano Concerto, and the Concerto for Orchestra.) The integrity of this structure is enhanced by having a theme from the first movement reappear in the finale, and by making the fourth movement a free variation of the second.

The second movement of the second quartet was composed in 1917, in the midst of the second world war. The melodic material could have certainly come from the Arabic music Bartók notated as part of his North Africa trips, but the Hungarian accent is undeniable. In his own words, Bartók described the second movement as, "a kind of rondo, with a developmental section in the middle." You will certainly recognise a frantic and intense ABA structure with tiny moments of pause; a mere holding of the breath before descending into madness once again.

Who was the man behind this revolutionary way of looking at and listening to music? Béla Bartók was born in 1881 and married twice. One son, Béla Bartók III with Marta Ziegler, and another son, Peter with Ditta Pásztor. He was a child prodigy with a fierce

humanitarian intellect. His concert schedule was intense with much touring as his prowess on the piano certainly matched his ability as a composer. Bartók loved nature and was a devoted naturalist. Dénes Koromzay, violist in the Hungarian String Quartet, described Bartók as, "one of the most direct and outspoken men in the world... Bartók made such strong anti-Nazi statements that he would have been the first to be picked up by the Gestapo when they came, or even by the Hungarian Nazis when they eventually came into power."

The fascination with folk tunes from many parts of Eastern Europe became the bedrock of his composition, and certainly his six quartets. He spent countless hours 'in the field' recording (often suspicious) locals singing into an Edison phonograph and recording onto wax cylinders. With the wonders of modern technology, we can now hear these easily (albeit with poor sound quality) on YouTube and other sources. Bartók spoke of his relationship with the peasant music saying, "It is a matter of absorbing the means of musical expression hidden in them [the peasant melodies], just as the most subtle possibilities of any language may be assimilated. It is necessary for the composer to command this musical language so completely that it becomes the natural expression of his musical ideas." Bartók's six string

quartets transcend the mere notes that are their medium to record the unfolding and renewing of a human spirit, a process of creativity and communication that perfectly embodies the composer's artistic credo: "I cannot conceive of music that expresses absolutely nothing."

Neither his first son Béla, nor Peter Bartók ever had children, so the lineage of this great Hungarian has genetically ceased. What a blessing to relish in the continued lineage of this music and the long line of composers inspired, or yet to be inspired by Béla Bartók.

This particular project began with the four of us reading "My Father" by Peter Bartók. This was enough to know that there was a story to be told and that it would fit with the quartets perfectly. With the fifth quartet at the top of our list for favourite quartets, we decided to feature this magnificent beast of string writing. Having worked with Richard Piper on a number of occasions, we had complete confidence in handing the idea over to him and giving him freedom to take the story wherever it needed to go. You will hear more about that journey throughout the course of the performance, but we are thrilled that Richard has fallen in love with the music of Bartók as much as we have.

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Richard Piper has spent almost his entire 43-year career on stage. Trained in London, he was soon performing on the West End in *Grease* and *Elvis* and came to Australia in 1985 with cult cabaret band The Bouncing Czecks.

MTC: *The Lady in the Van, Twelfth Night, Born Yesterday, Double Indemnity, Ghosts, Music, Queen Lear, The Gift, Drowsy Chaperone, Rockabye, Entertaining Mr Sloane, The Give and Take, Dumb Show, The Daylight Atheist (Green Room Award), Betrayal, Man the Balloon, Life After George, Measure for Measure, Comedy of Errors.* Malthouse: *The Black Rider, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

STC: *The Secret River, Gross und Klein, Great Expectations, Moby Dick.*

Bell Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream, The War of the Roses, Henry V, Henry IV*

STCSA: *Moby Dick, Marat Sade, Restoration*

Musical Theatre: *Come from Away, Oklahoma!, King Kong, Billy Elliot, Rocky Horror*

TV: *Wentworth, Underbelly*

Films: *Pirates of the Caribbean*

Flinders Quartet (FQ) is instantly recognisable as one of Australia's most loved chamber music ensembles. They are a quartet for the 21st century and a highly respected force in Australian chamber music, entering their third decade with acknowledged musical skill and maturity.

"...clearly a passionate and precise group that give exquisite clarity to each piece performed."
 - NIGHT WRITES, March 2020

Over twenty years, FQ has followed a unique path and lives up to their motto of "caring for tradition, daring to be different" through a busy schedule encompassing live and online performances, commissioning, recording, education and mentorship programs including the successful Composer Development Program (now in its sixth year), and outreach activities through their artistic patronage of John Noble's Quartet Program and residency at Footscray High School.



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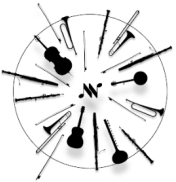
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