
FLINDERS QUARTET

ELIZABETH SELLARS violin

WILMA SMITH violin

HELEN IRELAND viola

ZOE KNIGHTON cello

LEGACY

Thursday 21 March 2024 • St Johns Southgate

Friday 22 March 2024 • Castlemaine Art Museum

Saturday 23 March 2024 • St John's Church, Flinders

Sunday 24 March 2024 • Montsalvat Barn Gallery

Monday 25 March 2024 • Melbourne Recital Centre

Monday 8 April 2024 • FQ Digital premiere

Flinders Quartet is based on Wurundjeri land in the Kulin Nation, and acknowledges that we live, work, and make music on unceded lands. We are privileged to play on land where music has been made for thousands of years. Flinders Quartet acknowledges the sovereignty of First Nations peoples of this continent and pays deep respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART 1756-1791

String Quartet No. 19 in C major, K.465 'Dissonance'

(composed 1785)

I. Adagio-Allegro

II. Andante cantabile in F major

III. Menuetto. Allegretto. (C major, trio in C minor)

IV. Molto allegro

This quartet comes from a set of six dedicated to one of Mozart's closest friends, mentors, and confidants - Joseph Haydn. Inspired by Haydn's Op. 33 quartets, which had just been performed and published in Vienna, Mozart composed the six "Haydn" quartets without commission, meaning there was obviously a burning passion to explore the unending possibilities that lie within the string quartet medium.

This quartet is the last of the six and is nicknamed the "Dissonance" because of its monumentally original opening which lasts for 22 bars. We've tried analysing the harmonic progressions and it's almost impossible. Apparently the first musicians gave the scores back because they were convinced that Mozart had made some errors. Even Haydn was flummoxed, but in the end he conceded, "If Mozart wrote it, he must have meant it."

We asked our six Emerge composer participants what a lesser composer would have done with the opening, and one said with incredible insight, "Made it longer."

After the initial 22 bars, the comparative lightness of the ensuing Allegro is made all the more pertinent by omitting the grounding bass of the cello. We are in the familiar realm of a sonata-form first movement which is not without its tricks and trademark Mozart genius, but we never again return to the extra-terrestrial, other worldliness of the opening.

The second theme in the Adagio second movement encases another section of suspension and harmonic ingenuity, but a little more earthbound in its conception. This same strangeness occurs three times, the third time breaking free into a glorious sequence of harmonies.

After the third movement Menuetto with tumultuous C minor trio, Mozart invokes the spirit of his mentor Haydn in a playful Rondo which is complete with his joyful, hiccupping rests.

We love imagining the scene of this quartet's first outing, with Haydn playing second violin and Mozart playing viola - of course.

GORDON KERRY 1961-

String Quartet No. 6 (composed 2023)

Commissioned by Flinders Quartet with support from Siobhan Lenihan, for Dolores and Denis Lenihan

Learning this piece has been such a satisfying experience, largely due to the number of unifying factors. Apart from the plainchant theme which is often hidden in plain sight (or hearing, as it were), the quaver tempo never fluctuates even though this will not be apparent to the listener.

The interlocking melodies and counterpoint fit together like a complex puzzle. But much like one Escher's intricate drawings, they change continually with each hearing dependent on the listener's auditory perspective.

The most glorious point in the piece is the outburst of A major which has been sitting in our subconscious since the beginning with the piece using the Dorian mode with A as a pivot note. This string quartet feels like music written in its purest form with no obvious subtext or narrative, just the perfection of organised sound.

A note from the composer:

"Siobhan Lenihan has been a close friend and colleague for many years, and was responsible for my composing my first quartet, *Torquing Points*, as part of a residency with Musica Viva in Schools, a program that she administered. So it is a great delight to compose a piece honouring her parents, Dolores and Denis, who were also very dear to me.

The piece was completed in May 2023 and is in one movement. It begins in slow, simple fashion, with modal counterpoint derived from a favourite plainchant that also informs much of the rest of the piece. A new section maintains the original pulse, but now in 6/8, leading to the work's fastest section where terse rhythmic ideas create contrast with more extended, serene counterpoint. The final section is slow, but ornately decorated."

Gordon Kerry is a composer and writer living on a hill in north-eastern Victoria. Recent works include *Whatever you brightness be* for organ, his second Piano Sonata for Amir Farid, *Alchemy* for the Australian Chamber Choir, Clarinet Quintet for Omega Ensemble, *Sinfonia concertante* for Alison Mitchell, Irit Silver and the Queensland Symphony Orchestra under Ben Northey; *Christchurch Monody* for The Marais Project, and a Violin Sonata for Emily Sun and Amir Farid presented by Musica Viva. Cellist Daniel Chiou premiered *Soliloquy* as

part of The ANAM Set in Melbourne, and *Six-Part Inventions* for Inveni Ensemble was performed in Melbourne and on a substantial tour of regional Victorian and NSW centres. His *Missa gaudeamus omnes* was performed in Sydney in November 2022. He has worked with Plexus, the jazz/gamba band Elysian Fields, Acacia Quartet, the Australia Ensemble and Halcyon; he has written four operas, a large body of orchestral and chamber music. His previous string quartets have been performed by the Melbourne, Australian, Acacia, Dorian, Sartory, Takács and St Lawrence String Quartets.

Kerry is the author of *New Classical Music: Composing Australia* and numerous articles and chapters on musical subjects. He has been awarded fellowships by the Ian Potter Cultural Trust, the Australia Council, the Peggy Glanville-Hicks Trust and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He studied composition with Barry Conyngham at the University of Melbourne.

INTERVAL

ETHEL SMYTH 1858-1944

String Quartet in C minor (composed 1881)

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Scherzo. Allegro - Trio. Molto vivace
- IV. Allegro

Ethel Smyth is perhaps best remembered for her composition of “The March of the Women”, the anthem for the suffragette movement as they fought for the right to vote. A copy of the manuscript for this piece is housed by the NGV.

In 1910, the same year she composed the suffrage anthem, she was one of just three women in England to hold a music doctorate. It is plainly clear that one didn't mess with Ethel: she bricked the window of a politician's house because he made “the most objectionable remark about Women's Suffrage she had ever heard.” What she achieved in the suffrage movement would have been enough for one lifetime, but Ethel was unstoppable. She was the first woman to receive a Damehood for composition. She was also the first woman to have a work played by the New York Metropolitan Opera. (And the only woman to have a work performed there until 2016.)

Ethel was determined to be a composer on her own terms. She distanced herself from her family and England by going to Leipzig, because Germany was in many ways “less hospitable to women” and because it was considered Europe's musical capital. She thought she would be taken more seriously if she could succeed there. She didn't want to be associated with the other English female composers such as Rosalind

Ellicott (born 1857) and Dora Bright (born 1862). She wanted to be seen as an honorary man.

Ethel had numerous affairs with both men and women. The closest she came to marriage was with Oscar Wilde's brother, William, but the impassioned romance ignited on a boat trip from Ireland to England was short lived. Her one true companion was a dog called Marco, admired by Tchaikovsky with whom she embarked into a spirited debate on the worth of Brahms' music. Ethel became quite friendly with Brahms although she assured her family, “if he were to propose to me, I would refuse.” Brahms and Ethel developed a strong mutual respect, and he even gave the occasional compliment about her music (not knowing it was hers). She wrote a rather scathing poem which Brahms was said to have quoted at dinner parties, the last stanza of which is: “The great Brahms is forever declaring that a clever woman is a nuisance. So, let us diligently cultivate stupidity by way of qualifying as thorough-paced Brahmsites.”

Ethel's C minor quartet was written in Leipzig, most likely under the tutelage of Reinecke with whom she studied. The original manuscript shows much of the tell-tale corrections for which she became famous. Apparently, musicians began to resent her appearing with a paste pot and scissors as it indicated they were in for a very quick relearning of their parts.

Ethel had been studying Beethoven at the time of writing this piece. There is a nod to his fifth symphony (the progression of C minor to C major) and an almost direct quotation of his String Quartet Op. 59 No. 2 in the second movement, but her individual voice is clear and unmistakable. We are flung back in our seats with the opening C minor outcry that melts into a heart-warming second theme. There is a searching quality to the music that lends itself to a constant reinvention of themes before a resigned coda. The second movement was originally to be an E flat Andante in ¾ but it seems her teacher suggested an Adagio in C may be a better idea. This correction resulted in a movement rich in a depth of emotion that belies her 23 years. A frolicking and highly intelligent two-part fugue that begins the Scherzo third movement gives way to a trio that creates great hijinx caused by asymmetrical phrases and bouncing bows. The coda is what sets this movement apart, keeping the audience on the edge of their seats right to the very end. This grand piece needs a suitable finale and the ensuing triumph into C major is well worth the wait. This is highly idiomatic, beautifully crafted writing that deserves far more attention.

Ethel ranked the string quartet highest above any other chamber music. She famously compared it to “an exquisite omelette”. Whereas orchestral pieces could have “so many ingredients a rotten egg can pass undetected”, a string quartet required each note to be perfect. The multitude of quartets in her sketchbooks attest to the fact that it was the genre she was most determined to conquer.

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