
FLINDERS QUARTET

ELIZABETH SELLARS guest violin

WILMA SMITH violin

HELEN IRELAND viola

ZOE KNIGHTON cello

FROM LITTLE THINGS...

Friday 19 May 2023 • Stanley Town Hall

Saturday 20 May 2023 • Christ Church Longford

Sunday 21 May 2023 • Scottsdale Mechanics' Institute Hall

Friday 26 May 2023 • Geelong Chamber Music Society

Saturday 27 May 2023 • St John's Church, Flinders

Sunday 28 May 2023 • Montsalvat Upper Gallery

Monday 29 May 2023 • Melbourne Recital Centre

Wednesday 14 June 2023 • FQ Digital premiere

Flinders Quartet acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work, live and learn, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

ANNE CAWRSE b. 1981

"in spaces between" (composed 2019)

It was a delight to discover Anne's piece through FQ's Ascend program for composer development, and while Anne talks about the *"wrenching of notes into existence"*, the end product is one of peace and perfect alignment. The harmonic and textural exploration as well as the organisation of sound make this piece the perfect 21st century extension of offerings from past masters.

A note from the composer:

"in spaces between' is a meditation upon the struggle of finding inspiration to compose within the small spaces in one's life. This is an experience all composers must deal with at one time or another, yet it seems especially pertinent to the life of the working mother, who also happens to be a composer. Where is the space to allow thoughts and ideas to flow freely? What happens to one's voice when their ideas are squeezed into such narrow, tight spaces?

The work's opening chorale - naive, simplistic, hopeful - is interrupted again and again as it attempts to 'become' something. A series of episodes or variations, built upon an often disguised ground bass, explore alternate states of confinement, monotony and uncertainty, eventually giving way to inspiration.

This piece was hard work. Be it life imitating art, or vice versa, I often felt I was wrenching the notes into existence, despite my clarity of concept. Whether or not the sound world here speaks of the issue it seeks to reflect, the process of writing it certainly did.

Finally, in celebration of a 20 year association with the wonderful Zephyr Quartet, the theme for this work is borrowed from the first piece I ever composed for them, *Repetito*, it too a passacaglia."

AMY BEACH 1867-1944

String Quartet, Op. 89 (composed 1921-29)

Amy Beach took Dvořák's advice to heart when he implored composers to make use of Native American tunes, but the quandary was that they often didn't fit into the normal Western construct of major and minor tonality.

A child prodigy, Amy Beach (née Cheney) was born in New Hampshire in 1867. At the age of 18, she made her debut as a pianist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, began a lifelong association with the publishing company Schmidt, and married Henry Beach, 25 years her senior. It was Henry Beach who encouraged her to focus on composition rather than performing.

After both her husband and mother died, Beach sailed to Europe in 1911, establishing a formidable concert career before returning to America in 1914 when war began, armed with countless reviews of her performances. By 1930, she had stopped touring and concentrated largely on composition. By the time she died in 1944, she had completed over 300 compositions.

She wrote a suite for children called "Eskimos", setting Indigenous tunes with late Romantic harmonies. In one of the tunes, 'Exiles', she enriched the original melodies through a *"free choice of chords which while foreign to the meagre harmonic scheme has not destroyed the native flavour"*.

By the time Beach came to write Quartet for Strings, she was looking for ways to exploit rather than hide the tunes' starkness, angularity and monophonic character. Perhaps because the tunes resisted the assimilation into the familiar formulas of major and minor, they forced her to make experiments.

Her Quartet for Strings (and sole composition for this combination) was started in 1921 and finished while in Rome in 1929; but the first public performance was not until 1942 at a two-day festival of Beach's music to celebrate her seventy-fifth birthday. Reviews of the concert found it *"a beautiful work in both form and content"*. Glenn Gunn said of Beach, *"a significant creative personality ...who unjustly but quite according to our national habit has been relegated to relative obscurity"*.

Beach's Quartet for Strings is in four sections:

Grave - Piu Animato - Allegro molto - Grave (a reprise of the first Grave)

All of the themes are borrowed Inuit tunes and she delays the resolution of certain passages, making it feel unfinished until the very end. She made a significant step towards musical modernism by normalising dissonance.

There are three tunes: 'Summer Song', 'Playing at Ball' and 'Ititaujang's Song'. You can hear the first and second tunes outlined by a lone viola after the opening introduction, while 'Ititaujang's Song' provides the basis for the Allegro molto and the resulting fugue.

Did Dvořák realise that with his suggestion of celebrating American themes, whether Native American, African American or Inuit, that this would necessitate a revolution in harmonic thought? Most probably, yes.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK 1841-1904
String Quartet No. 13 in G major, Op.106 (composed 1895)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio ma non troppo
- III. Molto vivace - Un poco più mosso
- IV. Finale. Andante sostenuto - Allegro con fuoco

Written in 1895 when he was thoroughly relieved to be home in his native Czechoslovakia after his stint in New York, Dvořák wrote this G major quartet and the A flat major quartet in quick succession. A prolific chamber composer, it will come as no surprise that Dvořák was a viola player, his first official opus was a viola string quintet followed closely by his first string quartet. He wrote a total of 14 string quartets; the 12th quartet is best known as "The American", and at least five others considered masterworks. This G major quartet came out of writer's block that Dvořák was feeling while composing the A flat major quartet. Eventually, it became the second last quartet that he completed. What a great way to procrastinate - write a magnificent chamber work!

It was Mrs Jeanette Thurber's invitation to Dvořák to be Artistic Director of the new National Conservatory of Music in New York and help develop a national style of music in America that inadvertently inspired Amy Beach; so perhaps it is to Thurber that we should look to as the real influence behind the assimilation of native melodies. Dvořák took this task to heart, immersing himself in spirituals, plantation songs of the south, and transcriptions of Amerindian melodies.

This four movement work features more rhythmic vitality than melodic development, use of pentatonic modes, and short motifs rather than long extended melodies; reflecting the influence that exploring folk tunes from his native Bohemia as well as his adopted home for a few years, America, had on his harmonic sensibilities. As well as the Beethovenian, deeply felt Adagio, it is worth noting, as with Amy Beach's Quartet for Strings, this work is written in cyclic form with the finale recalling the first movement's two main themes and even a bit of the second.

Notes copyright © 2023 Flinders Quartet. All rights reserved

ELIZABETH SELLARS
Guest Violinist

Elizabeth Sellars has been acclaimed as "powerful ... dynamically exciting" (The Australian) and as "one of the few violinists ... who can handle works that move in new directions" (The Age).



A prize-winning graduate of the Guildhall School of Music in London, Elizabeth is a sought-after chamber musician and has appeared for Musica Viva and in festivals and on radio worldwide. Her performances have been published by Move, Naxos, ABC Classics, Toccata Classics and Tzadik. In collaboration with Kenji Fujimura her world premiere recording of the 'The Messiaen Nexus' received international acclaim, including winning the 2014 Limelight Chamber Music Recording of the Year. Future releases include Australian Horn Trios and premiere recordings by Arthur Benjamin. Elizabeth has toured with the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields and The Australian World Orchestra. She is a founding member of the Sutherland Piano Trio and Quercus and collaborates regularly with Ensemble Liaison.

We are deeply grateful for the support of project partners:



Community Bank
Balnarring & District



Flinders Quartet profoundly values the support of all its sponsors, patrons, donors and advisors, all of whom are acknowledged at

flindersquartet.com