

GIOCOSO QUARTET

Thursday 5 April 2018, 8pm
Hobart Town Hall

Programme

Joseph HAYDN (1732-1809)
String Quartet in D major, op 71 no 2 (1793)
19 min

- I Adagio – allegro
- II Adagio cantabile
- III Menuetto: Allegretto – Trio
- IV Finale: Allegretto

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
String Quartet no 1 in A minor, op 41 no 1 (1842)
26 min

- I Andante espressivo-Allegro
- II Scherzo: Presto
- III Adagio
- IV Allegro

INTERVAL

Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)
String Quartet in F major (1902-03)
28 min

- I Allegro moderato
- II Assez vif, très rythmé
- III Très lent
- IV Vif et agité

Programme Notes

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in D major, op 71 no 2 (1793)

- I Adagio - Allegro*
- II Adagio cantabile*
- III Menuetto: Allegro & Trio*
- IV Finale: Allegretto – Allegro*

Upon his triumphal return to London in February 1794, Haydn brought with him one whole symphony (no 99), parts for two others (nos 100 & 101) and six new string

quartets, soon to be known as op 71 and 74 (because they were issued in two sets, each one provided, wrongly with a separate opus number). The quartets were destined to serve as a double purpose. They had been commissioned by an old friend and patron, Anton Georg, Count von Apponyi, a Freemason who sponsored Haydn's entrance into the Craft in 1785. It was customary for a commissioner to have exclusive performing rights of such works for a period of years, but in this case Haydn obviously intended the works - completed and delivered only in the previous year, 1793 - not so much for the limited circle of Apponyi and his Austrian friends, as for the forthcoming season in the fashionable concert rooms of his London impresario, the violinist Johann Peter Salomon.

The 'Salomon' quartets are remarkable for being the very first of their genre by any of the three Viennese masters for the form - Mozart, Beethoven or Haydn - to have been composed deliberately for the public concert hall. As such they are entirely different from the more leisurely, more 'detailed' and much more intimate works which Haydn had previously written for the Austrian connoisseurs. In the works of 1793 Haydn paints with a broad brush, replacing the immensely sophisticated, slow-paced, almost epicurean unfolding of his earlier works with a high-powered, nervous brilliance.

The D major Quartet, op 71 no 2, is the most brilliant of the series, and also the one where Salomon's virtuosity (he led the performance in his own concert rooms) is most exploited. There are whole bars of semiquavers in the first violin part of the opening *Allegro* which verge on being a violin concerto. In this work, the slow introduction serves the opposite function from that which it usually fulfils: whereas in most of the other works of the set, the chords are devised to set off a *piano* main theme, here the theme forthright *forte* which stamps its way in octave leaps from cello up to the first violin. The octave leaps then keep appearing in one guise or another throughout the movement, producing (and, from the players' point of view, expending) enormous amounts of energy. Since his listeners could only assimilate a limited amount of such high-powered music, (Beethoven had not yet stretched the limits of their endurance), Haydn keeps the movement astonishingly short. The Development section, for instance, is a single *crescendo* gesture spanning fewer than 20 bars.

The second movement begins virtually in slow motion. This is partly, of course, to balance the unabated intensity of the first, movement. Inevitably, the basic tempo soon dissolves into smaller divisions, however, a majestic calm seems to pervade throughout. Though not strictly a theme-and-variations movement, all the material used is based on the opening, and Haydn alters his theme by means of arabesques, appoggiaturas and subtle changes of rhythm.

The *Menuetto*, marked *Allegro* and almost like scherzo in feeling (though still three-in-a-bar, not one-in-a-bar), is a lively example of the new 'concert minuet', in which the *Trio* seems almost to be the same movement, that is: not a separate piece, as was almost the case earlier. The *Finale* starts out like a typical witty Haydn rondo, but is a curiously slowish tempo (*Allegretto*). Later in the movement the tempo suddenly jumps forward to *Allegro* and there is a return of the virtuoso violin writing of the first movement. The *staccato* runs in the first violin are later joined by all the

other instruments, *ff*, and the end, a brilliant flourish, is another sparkling tribute to Johann Peter Salomon's prowess.

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Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

String Quartet in A minor, op 41 no 1

- I *Andante espressivo – Allegro [Expressively, at a walking pace – Lively]*
- II *Scherzo: Presto [Scherzo: As fast as possible]*
- III *Adagio [Slow]*
- IV *Allegro [Lively]*

We often group the work of a visual artist into particular themes or periods, Picasso's 'blue' period being one example. This applies to many composers too, where over the course of their life they might shift from edgy modernism to a sudden interest in minimalism, and all the works of the respective era will have a similar kind of sound or style, no matter what the piece is for.

For Robert Schumann, his artistic shifts were not so much about styles, but rather forms, or choice of instruments. In the 1830s, he was mostly focused on the piano, though he completed an early attempt at a quartet too. In 1840, he was all about songs. Having thoroughly explored that, in 1841 he started to write big symphonic works. And in 1842, he got very excited about chamber music, producing his first three string quartets, his mighty piano quintet, and a number of other small-scale pieces.

Robert and his pianist/composer wife Clara kept a joint diary for the first few years of their marriage, and 1842 is a year of personal drama, including the birth of their first child, Marie. Robert had been toying with ideas for quartets since at least February, and also rather scathingly (though brilliantly) reviewed new quartets from now-forgotten contemporary composers in his music magazine around this time. But once he decided he was ready, he took only a few weeks in June to write not one but three.

June 1842

Our little one gives us indescribable pleasure; she grows daily and shows a good-natured personality with great vitality. Now the first tooth is in place. Clara's happiness about this and about the whole child is mine as well. The entire June was a kind month except for some days and nights of revelry... Yet I was also busy and productive, in a new sort of way, and have almost totally finished creating and notating two quartets for violins and so on in A minor and F major.

Some of Clara's diary notes across the years indicate her mildly expressed frustration at Robert hogging the piano. As her performances were a major source of income for the family, she was right to be concerned about losing her technique through lack of

practice; but she was also torn by her sincere support for his composing. Robert was fully cognizant of the problem, which was his dilemma also; and being 'Mr Clara Wieck-Schumann' was difficult for any man of his era, let alone one who struggled with mental health. So 1842 was a tough year overall, as the two artists negotiated these difficult boundaries. Sometimes, however, they played together (one suspects this mostly happened when Robert wanted to work through something).

The June 1842 entry continues:

Clara is playing little, except from quartets by Haydn and Mozart that we took up sequentially at the piano, and has also composed two songs for my birthday, the most successful she has ever written up to now...

It is no coincidence that they were playing string quartets on the keyboard. This was part of Robert's immersion into the genre, exploring past masters of it, absorbing the ways different voices or lines needed to be treated, and the means of creating contrast and consistency. Like an actor undertaking research before playing Hamlet, Robert did his legwork before making a serious attempt at creating his own new take on an established form. Whereas with many of his piano works he was content just to go with the flow and roll out a piece in whatever shape he felt like (hello, Fantasias), with his chamber music he looked to a more structured approach.

The three quartets of op 41 are dedicated to the couple's dear friend and colleague Felix Mendelssohn, and are not a million miles from that composer's own elegant style. Indeed, they were workshopped with the quartet players of their mutual friend, violinist Ferdinand David. In Schumann's First Quartet, heard on this program, some listeners also detect Beethoven – especially the 'mystical' late quartets, and Ninth Symphony – and even a thread from Haydn's quartet in D minor, which would make sense given the diary entry above.

Quartet no 1 opens with an arresting nod to the past, a Bach-like bit of imitative counterpoint unfurling its curling lines into a fuller treatment of a sad little falling motif. Robert chose to place the Scherzo second (there's no set 'rule' about this, composers tend to put something jaunty either second or third in a four-movement work). The beautiful flowing theme of the Adagio brings together the composer's knowledge of Beethoven but also his own earlier explorations of how to write a decent vocal line, in his 'year of song'; and there are also glimpses of those hours at the piano, with some pounding motifs that seem to suggest keyboard rather than strings. The Finale is another opportunity to show his technical skill, developing an idea across the whole stirring breadth of this powerful movement.

Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)
String Quartet in F major (1902-03)

1. Allegro moderato — Très doux
2. Asset vif — Tres rythmé
3. Très lent
4. Vif et agité

Ravel modestly described his own work: "My String Quartet represents a conception of musical construction, doubtless imperfectly realized, but emerging much more clearly than my earlier compositions". These earlier compositions included Pavane pour une infante défunte and Jeux d'eau. It was in 1902, the same year as the first production of Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande and the year before Shéhérazade, that he began his string quartet, dedicating it "A mon cher maître Gabriel Fauré". Apart from the obvious influence of Fauré on his pupil, it was probably Debussy's quartet of ten years earlier which prompted Ravel to write his quartet, though its influence is slight and only really affects the second movement. Fauré received the quartet somewhat critically, saying that the finale was badly balanced, but it won the wholehearted approval of Debussy — "In the name of the gods of music, and in my own also, do not touch a single note of what you have written in your Quartet". Ironically, Ravel had been rejected from the Prix de Rome and was even eliminated as ineligible at the 1904 preliminary trial. Debussy's response thus prompted a huge scandal, which was seized by the press and became known as the affaire Ravel. The first performance, given at the Société Nationale in Paris by the Heymann Quartet, did not take place until March 1904. The score was published in 1910 after Ravel had made certain revisions. The extent of the revisions is not known, but they are generally thought to be few and so the 1910 nouvelle édition revue par l'auteur is today accepted as the authentic score.

The String Quartet is in four movements and its two overriding features are its melodic charm and remarkable technical maturity. The first movement, marked Allegro moderato, is in ternary form and opens with a graceful violin theme which reappears, undergoing various transformations, throughout the work. Like Debussy, Ravel makes use of Franck's cyclic principle. There is a connecting passage before reaching the second subject, and here Ravel introduces a new lyrical tune, again in the first violin part, which is suspended over a firm dominant pedal. The second subject, another lovely tune, is doubled two octaves below on the viola — an early example of an effective and typically Ravellian technique. A short snippet of this tune is used as a punctuating figure in the passage leading to the recapitulation and again in the coda. The movement closes with reminders of both the main themes.

The second movement is a scherzo, marked très rythmé, and is full of energetic cross-rhythms. The most striking feature is the use of pizzicato, as in the corresponding movement of Debussy's quartet, and the opening theme, a short phrase, is strongly contrasted with a second theme, bowed and marked bier chance, which is reminiscent of the second theme in the first movement. These two themes are cleverly worked together before the introduction of a new theme in the trio section. Here the theme is played on the cello, très expressif, and is then passed to

the viola and the violins in turn. It continues with constant reminders of the previous themes until the scherzo returns and the movement ends with panache.

The slow movement is somewhat rhapsodic in character, with no strict form in the classical sense. Ravel introduces familiar material, particularly from the first movement, episodically – a technique which acts as a subtle cohesion of the whole work and which is more obviously demonstrated in the last movement. The mood is in contrast to the first two movements and gives the listener an opportunity to take stock of the highly melodic content of the work. Rhythmic motifs and comparatively bland phrases therefore dominate this movement, though there are two themes introduced on the viola. Perhaps the best way to describe this movement is as a conversation, complete with speeches, interruptions, questions and answers.

The finale is full of the vigour and brilliance promised by the marking *vif et agile* and anticipated by the tranquillity of the slow movement. It opens *fortissimo* with a unison tremolo relentlessly repeated before the main themes of the work are introduced for the last time. This motif is then brought back with renewed vigour to conclude the work. Ravel's brilliant string writing is displayed to the full here and clearly promises the skill and artistry of the later orchestral works which we now know so well.

Giocososo Quartet

SEBASTIAN CASLEANU, Violin

TEOFIL TODICA, Violin

MARTHA WINDHAGAUER, Viola

BAS JONGEN, Cello

Winners of the overall 2nd Prize, the Peter Druce Audience Award as well as the Musica Viva Australia Prize at the 2015 Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, the Vienna-based Giocososo String Quartet has emerged as one of the most promising and exciting young string quartets of their generation.

Founded in Vienna with the current formation since 2014, the Giocososo String Quartet has been the recipient of important chamber music prizes such as the Alban Berg Prize, Krenek Prize and Artis Prize at ISA Reichenau in Austria (2011), the HSBC Prize of the Aix-en-Provence Festival 2012 as well as the Vienna Windisch Chamber Music Prize in both 2012 and 2014. In 2016 they won the “Jeunesses Musicales Special Prize” at the world-renowned ARD International Music Competition in Munich, Germany.

As part of the Master’s Degree in Chamber Music, the group, whose members are citizens of Germany, Romania and the Netherlands, has worked extensively with the internationally renowned co-founding member of the Artis Quartet, Johannes Meissl at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, Austria.

Furthermore, the Giocososo Quartet are recent alumni of the renowned European Chamber Music Academy (ECMA) – led by prominent professors Hatto Beyerle and Johannes Meissl –, which has provided them with multiple international concert opportunities on top of regularly organised masterclasses with internationally renowned artists.

As such, the Giocososo String Quartet has worked with numerous important personalities of the chamber music world such as, Günter Pichler, Hatto Beyerle and Gerhard Schulz of the Alban Berg Quartet, Rainer Schmidt (Hagen Quartet), Andras Keller (Keller Quartet), Miguel da Silva (Ysayë Quartet), Stefan Metz (Orlando Quartet), Petr Prause (Talich Quartet), Hariolf Schlichtig (Cherubini Quartet) as well as Michel Letiec, Eberhard Feltz, Ferenc Rados, Avedis Kouyoumdjian, , Evgenia Epshtein (Aviv Quartet), Shmuel Ashkenasi (Vermeer Quartet) and Dan Prelipcean (Voces Quartet).

The Giocososo String Quartet regularly gives acclaimed recitals all over Europe and Australia in countries like Germany, Austria, the UK, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Turkey, Romania, Switzerland and others. They have been guests at international chamber music festivals such as the Bordeaux and Aix-en-Provence Festival in France, the Beethoven, Styrian and Kalkalpen Chamber Music Festival in Austria, the Orlando Festival in the Netherlands, the Niedersachsen Festival in Germany, to name a few.

Highlights of the 2015/2016 season saw the Giocososo String Quartet play their debut in the illustrious Wigmore Hall in London, the Musikverein in Vienna and the Great

Hall of the Romanian Atheneum in Bucharest as well as a tour through Brazil. In May 2017, the Giocoso will be first heard in Asia, where they will play in Tokyo, Japan and Seoul, South Korea.

Furthermore, as part of the Musica Viva Australia Special Prize, April 2018 will be devoted to an extensive tour through Australia in an exciting collaboration with the world renowned Israeli mandolinist Avi Avital.

Additionally, for the 2016/17 season they have been selected by an expert jury for the next generation talent support program, the New Austrian Sound Of Music, where they receive extra support for all abroad appearances through a worldwide network of embassies and cultural forums.

The Giocoso String Quartet is also involved in bringing their music to those who cannot normally make it to the concert hall. In conjunction with the Yehudi Menuhin Live-Music-Now Foundation they have taken part in special social projects to present music to the elderly and the intellectually and physically disabled.

All four members of the Giocoso Quartet are prizewinning musicians, admired both as soloists and as chamber music players.

Bas Jongen plays a Hendrik Jacobs cello (Amsterdam, ± 1690) kindly loaned to him from the collection of the Dutch Musical Instruments Foundation.