

MUSICA VIVA
TASMANIA PRESENTS —

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ORAVA QUARTET

Monday 6 March, 8 pm

Hobart Town Hall

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*Beautifully calculated and coordinated
...seemed to defy the laws of physics.*

Washington Post



Hailed by one critic as 'the real deal' for the future of Australian chamber music, this youthful and energetic quartet has established a formidable international reputation since its formation in Brisbane in 2007.

Orava is now Quartet-in-Residence with the Camerata of St John's in Brisbane and regularly collaborates with prominent Australian musicians, including Piers Lane, Slava Grigoryan, Karin Schaupp and William Barton. This is their first visit to Hobart.

JOSEPH HAYDN — *String Quartet no 63, 'Sunrise'*
Duration 22 minutes

ERWIN SCHULHOFF — *String Quartet no 1*
Duration 15 minutes

INTERVAL

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY — *String Quartet no 1*
Duration 30 minutes

DANIEL KOWALIK, violin
DAVID DALSENO, Violin
THOMAS CHAWNER, Viola
KAROL KOWALIK, Cello



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Musica Viva Tasmania's 2017 Season is an opportunity to experience chamber music as it was designed to be heard.

Program notes...

JOSEPH HAYDN

Quartet Op.76, No. 4 ("Sunrise")

- 1 *Allegro con spirito*
- 2 *Adagio*
- 3 *Menuetto. Allegro*
- 4 *Finale. Allegro, ma non troppo*

Imagine one of the most celebrated composers of the time, financially independent and with all the expertise that comes from nearly fifty years of crafting a genre into a form still known and loved hundreds of years later. The commission from Count Erdödy in 1791 for the set of quartets that form op. 76 must have given Haydn great pleasure, knowing his listeners were so growing in discernment that he could offer them the full weight and character of his technique. Their constant thirst for fresh ideas was thus met with music containing a rich variety of moods and an ever-changing palate of sound colours and textures, yet balanced with the elegant following of now-familiar structures and forms.

The first innovation in colour is apparent in the magical opening of the piece, from which the nickname 'Sunrise' originates. A soft glowing chord is sustained by the lower three instruments, while the first violin traces an upward arc of melody symbolic of dawn, before the dazzling light of rhythmic vitality bursts forth. Haydn is credited with establishing the string quartet as an exchange of four equals, and the first movement offers a masterclass in this sharing of melody and counterpoint, including an unusually eloquent viola part.

In his sixth decade, Haydn was preoccupied elsewhere with choral compositions, so it is no wonder that there are strong connections between this quartet and song traditions. The second movement is often described as a musical prayer with long lyrical lines and an aria-like development: delicate filigree work and great leaps in register from the first violin are accompanied by pulsing heartbeats of harmony. The mood totally changes for the rustic *Minuetto*, which is full of surprises; like the seamless connection to a trio that begins in imitation of a French country drone, then twists melancholically away. Originality continues into the finale which is a set of variations full of sudden dynamic changes, novelty ornaments and a coda with not one, but two energy surges of acceleration to the flourishing conclusion.



ERWIN SCHULHOFF

String Quartet No. 1

- 1 *Presto con fuoco*
- 2 *Allegretto con moto e con malinconia grottesca*
- 3 *Allegro giocoso alla Slovacca*
- 4 *Andante molto sostenuto*

Written in 1924, this was Schulhoff's second foray into the medium of quartet writing. At this time, he was well-established in the radical art circles of Berlin, strongly committed to modernism and rejecting traditional values. His peers, who included Berg, Webern, Scriabin and Schoenberg, recognised and appreciated these aspects in his music.

Why the rage against the establishment? In a story all too common for his cohort, the early adult life and professional development of Schulhoff had been abruptly interrupted by conscription and active service in World War 1. While he was lucky enough to survive, the composer's diaries document a shattered, disillusioned and bitter return to civilian life. For many young men, the older generation was to blame for leading them into unspeakable horror: long-held values and systems had failed, and there was a wish to rebuild society and culture in radically different ways.

For Schulhoff this meant embracing the movement of Dadaism – which reacted to the 'art is holy' sentiment with nonsense and tomfoolery. (One of his piano pieces *In Futurum* has a whole movement that consists entirely of rests.) He also explored popular music styles like the foxtrot, ragtime and jazz, wrote ironic send-ups of military-style music, and applied wit and humour while shunning traditional forms and structures.

In this brief quartet, many of his trademark experimental sounds can be seen and heard. The frenetic dance rhythms of the opening bars powerfully evoke the primitivism that had sparked a riot at the premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* just a decade earlier. The icy sounds of bows scraping the bridge (*ponticello* effect) and sparkling left-hand pizzicato feature heavily throughout the work, and the second movement even contains a viola joke, with a jaunty solo descending into a mock operatic recitative. The slow final movement gives a most unusual conclusion, with whispering pairs of instruments set against the cello which plays in an astonishingly high register. The ethereal 'night music' effect dissolves into silence, unwittingly foreshadowing Schulhoff's tragic death in a concentration camp in 1942.

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

String Quartet No.1

- 1 *Moderato e semplice*
- 2 *Andante cantabile*
- 3 *Scherzo. Allegro non tanto e con fuoco – Trio*
- 4 *Finale. Allegro giusto – allegro vivace*

By the early 1870s, Tchaikovsky had already completed a number of symphonic and operatic works and was ready to flex his intellectual and musical muscles in a new area. While acknowledging that his predecessors, Beethoven and Schubert, were masters of personal expression in the string quartet genre, Tchaikovsky nevertheless was heavily influenced by Mozart, extolling in letters to others the 'charm, purity of texture, and beauty of part-writing' found in Mozart's chamber music.

This considered position was the origin of the first significant Russian writing for string quartet. Tchaikovsky was interested in exploring the sonorities of the instruments and from the very first notes pushed for fuller textures - the first chord has six rather than the expected four notes, and the very last chords have 13 notes in total. In the opening, the sweetly lilting phrase is rhythmically ambiguous but becomes familiar as it is repeated throughout the movement. Each instrument gets a chance to play the melody but it is the first violin that showcases the technically demanding runs so often used by this composer.

A distinctly Russian voice emerges in the famous *Andante* with Tchaikovsky's use of a folk song. The original texts of this song mention rum and/or pipe-smoking, giving hints that this is not a miserable dirge, but is perhaps merely contemplative music. In contrast, the third movement follows Haydn's tradition, becoming more comic by using folk dance rhythms and surprise changes in tonality and dynamics. The finale begins with a graceful air that gives little hint of the breakneck dance that is to come. It builds with rising energy to an incongruous chord, followed by a silent pause. When the music recommences, it is soft and slow, fading to another pause. But the composer, who was later to use cannons for percussive effect, could never finish without fanfare, and the quartet makes a mad rush to five huge chords and a spectacular ending.

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The Sunday Times (London)

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