

Christopher's Classics - Series XXVIX 2024

Aroha Quartet with Oleksandr Gunchenko



Robert Ibell (cello), Konstanze Artmann (violin), Haihong Liu (violin), Zhongxian Jin (viola)
and Oleksandr Gunchenko (double bass)

Performing: Boccherini, Webster,
Onslow, Silvestrov and Dvorák

Presented by
Sunday Classics Inc

Elizabeth Ball Trust



Tuesday, May 21st, 2024, 7:00 PM
The Piano, 156 Armagh St, Christchurch

The busiest lives deserve beautiful music.

Programme

Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805) – *String Quintet in D major, Op. 39 No. 3, G. 339*

Louise Webster - "*Swim with Sliding Continents*"

George Onslow (1784-1853) - *String Quintet No. 15 in C minor, Op. 38 "Le Balle"*

Interval

Valentyn Silvestrov (1937-) - *Postlude No. 3*

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) – *String Quintet No. 2 in G major, Op. 77*

Aroha String Quartet

The Aroha String Quartet, **Haihong Liu, Konstanze Artmann** (violins), **Zhongxian Jin** (viola) and **Robert Ibell** (cello) is firmly established as one of New Zealand's finest chamber music ensembles demonstrating "accomplished brilliance, soulfulness and sublime intensity in perfect balance and tonal unity" (The Dominion Post).

Founded in 2004, this versatile Wellington-based quartet is known for its passionate musicality, impressive technique, and multicultural innovation. The quartet is committed to presenting string quartet works from western classical and avant-garde repertoire to traditional Chinese folk music, as well as works for larger forces through collaborations with numerous high-profile musicians.

Oleksandr Gunchenko was born in Kiev, Ukraine. He became a member of the National Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra at the age of 19 and at the age of 20 gained a position with the National Chamber Orchestra of Ukraine. Oleksandr joined the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra in 2007.

Programme Notes

Boccherini String Quintet in D major, Op. 39 No. 3, G. 339 (1787)

- I. *Allegro vivo*
- II. *Pastorale. Amoroso ma non lento*
- III. *Finale. Presto*

Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805) was born in the town of Lucca in northern Italy. He studied cello and became a virtuoso eventually. After moving to Spain where he took employment with the Spanish royal family for the rest of his life, Boccherini wrote more than 120 string quintets!

If Boccherini, a cellist, were to take part in the music he wrote, it would have to be a quintet for 2 cellos. It is extraordinary, given that he had no prior example to guide him, how well Boccherini's cello quintets turned out. With two cellos, no one cello has to fulfil the bass line at all times. He then uses this freedom to achieve an extraordinary balance between the instruments with all of the voices having solo opportunities.

The String Quintet in D Major, G.339 by Boccherini is the last of a set of three dating from 1787 and is among his better known quintets. What is unusual about this set, judging from his manuscript, is that Boccherini intended these three quintets to be played by a cello and bass rather than two cellos. Unfortunately, the bass part to this quintet seems to have been lost. Unlike the first two quintets, this one is only in three movements and not in four movements. It opens with a very energetic *Allegro vivo* and is followed by a beautiful *Pastorale*. The finale, a *Presto*, is full of twists and turns.

Notes by Haihong Liu

Webster "Swim with Sliding Continents" (2012)

Louise Webster was born in Auckland and grew up in Napier and Wellington. Louise has a dual career in music and medicine, working as a child psychiatrist and paediatrician at Starship Children's Hospital and the School of Medicine, and as a composer.

This work for strings was written in 2012 for the Westlake High Schools Chamber Orchestra. The piece was shaped by images of swimming, floating and drifting above lands/gulfs/chasms; the idea of moving with urgency and effort, and at other times being carried with the flow, or drifting and rising above it.

While writing this work, Louise happened to read 'Woman to Child', a poem by Australian poet Judith Wright, and was drawn to several lines in the poem:

"There moved the multitudinous stars,
and coloured birds and fishes moved.
There swam the sliding continents."

In this particular programme, Aroha Quartet with Gunchenko will perform this work as a string Quintet.

Notes by Haihong Liu

Onslow String Quintet No. 15 in C minor, Op. 38 "Le Balle" (1829)

- I. *Allegro moderato ed espressivo*
- II. *Minuetto. Dolore - Febbre e delirio*
- III. *Andante sostenuto. Convalescenza*
- IV. *Finale. Allegro. Guarigione*

George Onslow (1784-1853) was a prolific French composer who was admired by Beethoven and Schubert for his ability of merging the drama of opera into the chamber music idiom. He wrote 36 string quartets and 34 string quintets, which were very famous at the time. Schubert even modelled his own 2 cello quintet (D956) on those of Onslow and not, as is so often claimed, on those of Boccherini. His work fell into oblivion after WWI. Only since the bicentennial of his birth it has slowly been rediscovered, played and recorded.

His Quintet No 15 in C minor, "Le Balle" ("The Bullet"), was composed after Onslow had a hunting accident, where he got accidentally shot in the face. The first movement is a determined *Allegro moderato ed espressivo* full of minor-key intensity. The Minuet is titled "Dolore", depicting sharp pains and intense suffering. In the trio, "Febre e Delirio", we hear the hooves of the galoping horses at the hunt haunting him in his delirious fever. The hymn-like 3rd movement, "Convalescenza", might be compared to Beethoven's Heiliger Dankgesang. The 4th movement "Guarigione" celebrates the full recovery in a very joyous and exuberant way.

Notes by Konstanze Artmann

Silvestrov Postlude No. 3 (1982)

Valentyn Silvestrov is a contemporary Ukrainian composer who was born in 1937. He is known for his unique style, which is often characterised as post-modernist and combines elements of classical music with avant-garde techniques.

The third Postlude (written in 1982) is an elegiac miniature, a beautiful and evocative work that showcases Silvestrov's unique musical voice which is characterised by its use of gentle dissonance, meditative pacing, and a sense of nostalgic longing. The Postlude no. 3 was originally written for violoncello and piano. I have got my inspiration to transcribe it for double bass and string quartet from Joel Quarrington who is a phenomenal Canadian double bass player. Joel was impressed by Silvestrov's music overall but he arranged and recorded Postlude after Russia's full scale invasion to Ukraine in February 2022 and described it as a "A Prayer for Peace in Ukraine". It has been 10 years since Russia invaded Ukraine and 2 years since full scale invasion.

When Silvestrov arrived to his second home Germany after a few months of full scale invasion he gave an interview where he explained to the reporter that despite the atrocities he saw on the way from Ukraine to Germany he always heard the most peaceful melody in his head. He then proceeded to playing it on the piano.

The Postlude, for me, has quite a similar feel and meaning. In order to overcome at times overwhelming cruelty and ugliness of war you need to have the courage to find strength in the inner peace.

Notes by Oleksandr Gunchenko

Dvořák String Quintet No. 2 in G major, Op. 77 (1875, rev. 1888)

- I. *Allegro con fuoco*
- II. *Scherzo. Allegro vivace*
- III. *Poco andante*
- IV. *Finale. Allegro assai*

Antonín Dvořák composed his second String Quintet when he was 34 years old. At the time he was already becoming a prominent figure in Prague musical circles, particularly for developing the Bohemian voice for which he would become known worldwide.

The Quintet in G major that Dvořák completed in 1875, and called Op. 18, was composed for a chamber music competition. It won the prize and lavish praise from the jury for its "distinction of theme, technical skill in polyphonic composition, mastery of form," and "knowledge of the instruments."

It consisted of five movements however Dvořák later withdrew the second movement, entitled "Intermezzo," due to concerns that having two slow movements made the work too lengthy. In my humble opinion he had a point there. This extracted movement would later become the Nocturne for Strings, Op. 40.

The four-movements work was published in 1888 but as Op. 77 instead of Op. 18. Simrock (the publisher) often published older Dvořák works with deceptively high opus numbers, which greatly annoyed the composer, who did not want the public mistaking his youthful works for mature ones.

The addition of the double bass to the standard quartet adds sonority and a sense of space, which greatly contributes to the open-air quality of the work, particularly in the first movement. Dvořák, who had a Schubertian gift for melody, here makes less do more throughout the work. Small motifs are combined into long sequences, repeated while the harmony changes around them, or pitted against one another in counterpoint. It says much about Dvořák's ability to develop his material, that the music never becomes tedious regardless of how much repetition goes into its construction.

Notes by Oleksandr Gunchenko

Christopher's Classics Next Concert:

Ākarana Quartet



performing **Turina, Martinů, Jennings** and **Schumann**

Thursday 29th August 2024, 7:00 PM

at **The Piano** 156 Armagh St.

Tickets: Door Sales: \$40 (students **\$15**) by cash
\$42 (students **\$17**) by credit card/EFTPOS.

On-Line Sales: www.eventfinda.co.nz (all charges to purchaser)

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