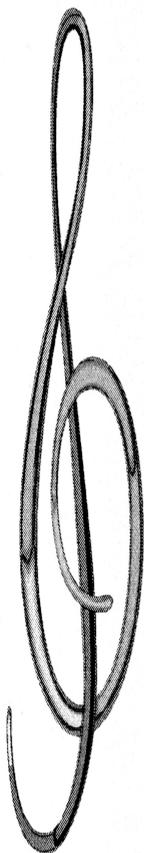


Christopher's Classics - Series XXV 2020  
presents

# Aroha Quartet with Robert Orr



*Performing:* Britten, Beethoven, Taylor  
and Bliss

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# Aroha Quartet with Robert Orr

## Programme:

**Britten (1913 - 1976)** - *Phantasy Quartet for Oboe and String Trio in F minor, Op. 2;*

**Beethoven (1770 - 1827)** - *String Quartet No. 7 in F major, Op. 59 No. 1 "Rasumovsky";*

*Interval: 15 minutes*

**Alex Taylor (b. 1988)** - *Refrain for String Quartet;*

**Bliss (1891 - 1975)** - *Quintet for Oboe and String Quartet, Op. 44.*

## Aroha String Quartet

Acclaimed as demonstrating "accomplished brilliance, soulfulness and sublime intensity in perfect balance and tonal unity" (The Dominion Post), the Aroha String Quartet is firmly established as one of New Zealand's finest chamber music ensembles. Founded in 2004, this versatile Wellington-based quartet is known for its passionate musicality, impressive technique, and multicultural innovation.

Haihong Liu and Zhongxian Jin are original members of the Aroha Quartet. Robert Ibell joined the group in 2009 and Konstanze Artmann in late 2018.

The Aroha 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.

The members of the the Aroha Quartet are committed educators. The Quartet runs the annual ASQ International Music Academy, a week-long chamber music course in Wellington, and the ASQ International Music Academy in Asia, an equivalent course in China. They also undertake a variety of educational projects around New Zealand each year.

## Robert Orr - Oboe

Robert is principal oboe of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. He has also played as guest principal oboe with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Robert is an established recital artist having appeared for the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts, and Chamber Music New Zealand. As a soloist he has played with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra. Robert is an Artist Teacher at the New Zealand School of Music.

# Programme Notes

## ***Benjamin BRITTEN - Phantasy Quartet for Oboe and Strings***

The *Phantasy* for oboe and string trio was an early piece that Britten composed as a nineteen year-old in the Autumn of 1932. It received its first performance the following summer and was also the first work of Britten's to be performed overseas - in Florence in 1934 as the result of an International Society for Contemporary Music competition. It also received an early broadcast by the BBC. The title *Phantasy* refers to a genre of Elizabethan and Jacobean instrumental music denoting a composition that is free in form and inspiration. The piece itself is formed around three general ideas: the first, a march figure; the second, a lyrical oboe melody; and the third, a brisk violin motive. The piece begins with the string instruments marching in seemingly from beyond the horizon, growing louder and louder as they draw closer. The oboe then appears gently from above with a sustained lyrical melody. A brisk section follows full of scampering movement, angular percussive gestures, and some lively passages featuring the oboe's earthy and gritty lower register. After a lengthy central section for string trio alone, the oboe descends rhapsodically again from above and gradually brings the string instruments back into rank and file, setting them off on their march again until they fade away into the silence from which they had so quietly emerged not so long before. For such a young composer Britten shows an exceptional mastery of musical craft and, while this work may give the impression at times of being free and improvisatory in character, it is the result of the composer's keen sense of symmetry, structure, and balance.

*Duration: 13'*

## ***Ludwig van BEETHOVEN***

### ***String Quartet No. 7 in F major, Op. 59, No. 1, "Rasumovsky"***

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando*
- III. *Adagio molto e mesto*
- IV. *"Thème Russe": Allegro*

By 1806, when Beethoven began the three string quartets published as his Opus 59, he had already composed many of his middle-period masterpieces. His Piano Concertos Nos. 3 and 4, the *Tempest*, *Waldstein*, and *Appassionata* Sonatas, *Fidelio*, and the Third and Fourth Symphonies, all lay behind him. He was now firmly established as the leading composer of his time, and yet he decided to seek more intimate triumphs by returning, after six years, to the most rigorous and demanding form of "pure" instrumental music, the string quartet.

One of the composer's most enthusiastic and effusive supporters was Russia's ambassador to Vienna, Count Andreas Razumovsky, who commissioned the three Opus 59 Quartets, which now bear his name. The first of the Opus 59 Quartets is the most expansive of the three: it opens with an amiable and supple theme, but its fragmentation begins almost immediately with soloistic passages for each of the four players, and sudden shifts of colour and mood leave the listener as dazed as the players who were entrusted with the première. When the main theme returns for what sounds like an exposition repeat, Beethoven quickly leads us off into a fanciful and discursive development.

Coming second is not the expected slow movement, but a scherzando sonata-form Allegretto vivace. Here the musical material is equal parts rhythm and melody. The intricate interplay of the drum-like rhythm and the enchanting melodic responses to it combine and confront one another in the course of the movement to produce a miraculous example of Beethoven at his most inventive.

Beethoven's most powerful music is often the slowest and sometimes the quietest. This is certainly the case in the third movement of this Quartet, which is marked Adagio molto e mesto. A march of what has been called Shakespearean grandeur, the music expresses private grief in closely harmonised ensemble writing, at times embellished with decorative passagework that foreshadows the adagios of Beethoven's late quartets.

A cadenza-like passage for the first violin leads directly into the fourth movement. Here Beethoven fulfils a request from Count Razumovsky, who asked that the composer employ a Russian theme in each of the Quartets. Drawn from a published collection of Russian folk songs, the theme is aptly suited for exploitation in Beethoven's most advanced manner. He constructs a fleeting and fanciful finale that proceeds vigorously and directly to the finish line.

*Duration: 40'*

### **Alex TAYLOR - Refrain for String Quartet (2013)**

The composer describes this work as follows –

“Refrain:

1. verb (used without object): to abstain from an impulse to say or do something.
2. verb (used with object) (Archaic): to curb.
3. noun: a phrase or verse recurring at intervals in a song or poem, especially at the end of each stanza; chorus.

‘Refrain’ was written at a time of some kind of social paralysis for the composer; the piece is a working through of what action or inaction might mean. The musical material winds its way through the quartet as a single line, interrupted by broad chorales that act as a kind of subtly shifting refrain.”

*Duration: 15'*

## **Sir Arthur BLISS (1891 - 1975) - Quintet for Oboe and Strings**

- I. *Assai sostenuto – Moderato – Allegro assai agitato – Tempo I (Moderato) – Molto meno mosso*
- II. *Andante con moto – Allegro moderato – Tempo I*
- III. *Vivace*

Bliss composed his Oboe Quintet in 1927 as a commission from the American philanthropist Elizabeth Coolidge for a festival that she was sponsoring in Venice in the same year. The piece very much reflects Bliss's own observation that, when composing, he would feel the need for some form of extra-musical impulse, "the stimulus of words, or a theatrical setting, [or] a colourful occasion" (one of his first successful compositions was incidental music for a production of Shakespeare's *Tempest*). For this reason, the Oboe Quintet can give the impression of being comprised of a sequence of theatrical (or film) episodes that feature a broad range of very different *dramatis personae*, reinforced by the wide variety of contemporary musical styles that the composer was absorbing in America at the time. Alongside the lush (European) musical language of Richard Strauss, for example, the listener can also hear elements of Stravinsky, Schönberg, and the film score composers of the time, such as Erich Korngold. In much English music of the twentieth century the combination of oboe and strings can tend to reflect an early Georgian literary aesthetic that took its inspiration from the countryside and nature: the oboe typically serves to evoke the atmosphere of a calm and idyllically British pastoral landscape (with rolling hills, peacefully grazing cows, sleepy villages and vicarages, etc.). However, Bliss's oboe quintet expresses throughout a restlessness and anxiety brewing beneath the surface of this somewhat twee rural serenity: a dark foreboding of something worse than just inclement weather. This disquiet becomes particularly evident in the final movement when a cheerful Irish folk dance, *Connolly's Jig*, blithely appears only then to be fragmented and distorted, culminating in a frenetic and whirling virtuosic display in the oboe line. The work presents a cast of chameleon-like characters and a snapshot of a range of diverse musical styles that co-existed in the second decade of last century.

*Duration: 20'*

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