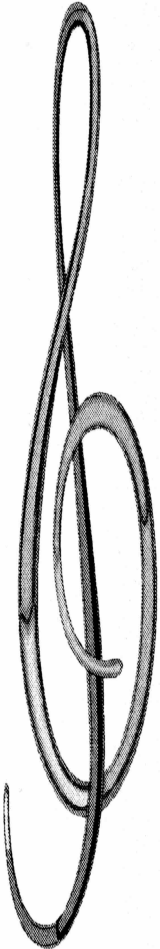


Christopher's Classics - Series XXVII 2022

presents

# New Zealand String Quartet



Helene Pohl (violin) Monique Lapins (violin) Rolf Gjelsten (cello) Gillian Ansell (viola)

*Performing:* Haydn, Shostakovich and  
Walton

Presented by  
Sunday Classics Inc

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Elizabeth Ball Trust

 THE PIANO  
CENTRE FOR MUSIC AND THE ARTS

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Thursday, June 2nd, 2022, 7:30 PM  
**The Piano**, 156 Armagh St, Christchurch

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*The busiest lives deserve beautiful music.*

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# Programme

**Haydn (1732-1809)** – *String Quartet Op. 20, No. 4 in D major*

**Shostakovich (1906-1975)** – *String Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 68*

*Interval*

**Walton (1902-1983)** – *String Quartet No. 2 in A minor*



Christopher Marshall who founded, and for 25 years ran, Christopher's Classics sadly passed away on 8 April 2022.

Christopher's contribution to the musical life of Christchurch and New Zealand has been immense. He was instrumental in bringing chamber music concerts to Christchurch and he has supported many young New Zealand musicians. We are blessed in New Zealand with a large number of world class musicians; many of whom have been assisted by Christopher.

In 2020, Christopher was awarded a QSM for his services to music.

The New Zealand String Quartet would like to dedicate tonight's concert to the memory of Christopher Marshall, beloved friend and cherished supporter of the arts in Christchurch. Christopher's and Jilly's generous support of the NZSQ is deeply appreciated by us all. Christopher will be missed, and his legacy lives on.

# Programme Notes

## Joseph Haydn

### *String Quartet Op. 20, No. 4 in D major (1772)*

- I. *Allegro di molto*
- II. *Un poco adagio e affettuoso*
- III. *Allegretto alla zingarese*
- IV. *Presto scherzando*

Commonly known as the father of the symphony, Franz Joseph Haydn's contribution to the string quartet genre is equally impressive. He composed around seventy works in the genre, so it's no wonder a number of them have been affectionately nicknamed (or some might say burdened!) with titles of great variety. *The Frog*, "*How Do You Do?*", *The Donkey* and *The Joke* being some of the more memorable names bestowed, often by music enthusiasts rather than the composer himself.

Haydn's fourth quartet in his Op. 20 sits radiantly in amongst a set of six works entitled "The Sun Quartets" – nicknamed not for its musical attributes, but for the picture of a rising sun that graced the cover of an early publication.

Amongst the six quartets, the opening of the fourth quartet in D major is both the simplest and the most ripe with expectation. No clever interplay here, no witty interjections, no academic 'in jokes' but three low rhythmic D's followed by a longer note establish the serious intent of this quartet. All four instruments work together either in unison or in modulating harmony. Virtuoso contrast is derived from the fast triplet section that might well have been part of a violin concerto for all its verve and impact. The D minor Theme and Variations that follows is as serious as it is gracefully crafted. The concertante treatment of the four protagonists creates the perfect foil to the opening movement. As the variations progress, the coherence gradually loosens, so that in the third movement all caution is thrown in the wind. The title suggests a gypsy minuet, whatever that may mean. What we hear is anything but a normal minuet, a cleverly calculated joke that plays havoc with the traditional metre of the dance form followed by a finale with comic effects, break-neck virtuosity, outright cheek and, as always, surprise!

## **Dmitri Shostakovich**

### ***String Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 68 (1944)***

- I. Overture: *Moderato con moto*
- II. Recitative and Romance: *Adagio*
- III. Valse: *Allegro*
- IV. Theme and Variations: *Adagio*

Dmitri Shostakovich wrote as many string quartets as symphonies – fifteen of each. His symphonies present emotional rawness and power on an immense scale, yet his quartets show he used the voicing and connection between each of the string instruments as a vehicle for more intimate utterances few symphonies could adequately capture. Born into a musical family in pre-revolutionary Russia, Shostakovich encountered political intrusion from the communist regime throughout his career that led to both setbacks and opportunities. Shostakovich's artistic relationship with the Soviet Union was frequently uneasy – hardly surprising for a composer who lived through the 1917 Revolution, two world wars, and a succession of repressive state controls. A number of his quartets appeared at key points in European history. The Fourth, exhibited "Jewish" themes at a time of widespread anti-Semitism; the Eighth, written during a visit to the badly bombed city of Dresden, was dedicated "to the memory of the victims of fascism and war".

Shostakovich's second string quartet was written in just nineteen days in 1944, during a Soviet era 'writers' retreat' about 300km north-east of Moscow, intended to inspire creativity for artists and writers of the time. By that stage, Shostakovich had already written eight symphonies, and the string quartet had become a relatively new interest. Most commentators find it hard to see the work as a response to the 'Great Patriotic War.' Rather, a letter to V. Y. Shebalin (the Quartet's dedicatee), then considered to be the Soviet Union's foremost composer of quartets, throws some light on the composer's intentions, the thematic connections with Shostakovich's second Piano Trio, and above all its allusions to Russian folk music, including the many Jewish inflections that permeate the piece, melodic as well as gestural.

# William Walton

## ***String Quartet No. 2 in A minor (1945/46)***

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Presto*
- III. *Lento*
- IV. *Allegro molto*

Originally wanting to serve as an ambulance driver in World War II, the government decided he would be more useful as a composer after he landed several ambulances in the ditch. William Walton spent the war writing film scores, including the music to Laurence Olivier's adaptation of *Henry V* and *The First of the Few*. In the summer of 1945, months after the end of the war in Europe, Walton set to work on a string quartet. He had written no major works since the *Violin Concerto* of 1939, and Walton – a careful craftsman – required nearly two years to complete the quartet. The first performance, by the Blech String Quartet, took place on a BBC broadcast on May 4, 1947.

All of Walton's considerable virtues are evident in the *String Quartet in A minor*: a clear sense of form, incredible rhythmic energy and virtuoso instrumental writing. The quartet is remarkable for the central role it assigns to the usually-neglected viola – much of the characteristic sonority of this quartet originates with mid-range sound of that instrument, which announces a number of the quartet's main ideas.

The opening *Allegro* is in sonata form, beginning with the two central voices – second violin and viola – in two-part counterpoint, from which the viola spins out the long and haunting main idea that will dominate this movement. The second movement, a scherzo, rockets off with relentless vigour. Marked *Presto*, this is virtuoso music, full of leaps, trills and accidentals; its pace broadens slightly at the ringing climax, and suddenly vanishes into the distance. Walton mutes his instruments for the *Lento*, with the viola laying out the long opening theme, marked *espressivo*. Remaining in the spotlight, the viola also introduces the theme of the central section accompanied by a somewhat whimsical pizzicato accompaniment within a sombre movement. The concluding *Allegro molto* returns to the energetic vigour of the second movement, but with steely brilliance: long passages are written in unison, and the blistering pace of non-stop semi quavers gives this music the feel of perpetual motion, with the melodic line whipping around between the four instruments. The opening material quickly returns, and the Quartet flies to its exciting close on unison hammered A's.

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*The New Zealand String Quartet Trust acknowledges the use of a Storioni violin, kindly loaned by Mr David Duncan Craig, as a trustee of the Lily Duncan Trust; and the use of an Amati viola, kindly loaned by the Adam Foundation.*

**Christopher's Classics Next Concert:**

# **NZ Chamber Soloists**



performing **Clarke, Sheng, McLeod** and **Babadjanian**

**Tuesday 28th June** 2022, 7:30 PM

at **The Piano** 156 Armagh St.

**Tickets: Door Sales: \$40** (students **\$15**) by cash  
**\$45** (students **\$17**) by credit card/EFTPOS.

**On-Line Sales:** [www.eventfinda.co.nz](http://www.eventfinda.co.nz) (all charges to purchaser)

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or visit our website [www.christophersclassics.nz](http://www.christophersclassics.nz)

### **Acknowledgements:**

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