

Christopher's Classics - Series XXIV 2019
presents

NZSQ

New Zealand String Quartet



Photo credit - Andrew Empson

Monique Lapins (violin), Gillian Ansell (viola), Rolf Gjelsten (cello), Helene Pohl (violin)
Performing: Beethoven, Jack Body, Shostakovich, Brahms

Wednesday, May 1st, 2019, 7.30pm
The Piano, 156 Armagh St, Christchurch

The busiest lives deserve beautiful music.

This concert is presented in association with Chamber Music New Zealand



Presented by
Sunday Classics Inc



Elizabeth Ball Trust



Programme: New Zealand String Quartet

Beethoven *String Quartet in A Major, op. 18, no. 5*

Jack Body *Bai sanxian*

Shostakovich *String Quartet No. 10 in A-flat Major*

Interval : 15 minutes

Brahms *String Quartet in A Minor, op. 51, no. 2*

Notes

Ludwig van Beethoven
String Quartet in A, Op. 18 No. 5

I. Allegro

II. Menuetto

III. Andante cantabile

IV. Allegro

The set of six Opus 18 quartets fall among Beethoven's early works, composed in 1798 when he was living in Vienna and coming to terms with his loss of hearing. At this time, his style was changing as he began to reject Classical ideals and search for a new form of expression. The quartets were no doubt in response to the impressive oeuvres of Mozart and Haydn, the latter of whom was still composing quartets at that time, and he sought to emulate Mozart's work through compositional strategies and ideas.

In the first movement, the effect of the bright and open key of A major is amplified by an energetic dance-like style, which quickly moves between lilting relaxation and tense uncertainty. The elegant and refined *Menuetto* gives way to a Trio section, where the melody is heard in the middle of the ensemble. The theme and variations of the *Andante cantabile* begin gently, eventually building up to a humorous final variation, in which boisterous intimations of fairground music give way to a pastoral journey that finally finds its way back to the original theme. The pleasant energy of the final movement features the type of motivic development for which Beethoven has become known, and ends on a strangely poignant and graceful note.

Jack Body (1944 - 2015)

Bai sanxian

Jack Body was a composer, ethnomusicologist and Professor of Composition whose music spanned almost all genres, including solo, chamber and orchestral music, choral, opera, music for dance and film, and electro-acoustic music. He was fascinated by the music and cultures of Asia and was a powerful force in the introduction of China's multi-faceted musical culture to New Zealand and, later, New Zealand music to China. After studies in Auckland, Cologne and Utrecht, and a year as a guest lecturer in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, Body taught and composed at Victoria University of Wellington's School of Music for thirty years. Here he built strong cross-cultural connections by initiating programmes for traditional musicians to work collaboratively with staff and students. Written in 2009, this short piece comes from a collection of transcriptions and arrangements of music from some of the Chinese minority nationalities of Yunnan province in South-West China.

The Bai people are one of 56 ethnic minorities officially recognised by the People's Republic of China and number around 2 million. This piece is a transcription of a field recording by Professor Zhang Xingrong of the Yunnan Fine Arts Institute featuring a very 'jazzy' performance on a 3-stringed plucked instrument called the *sanxian*.

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906 - 1975)

String Quartet No. 10 in A-flat Major

I. Andante

II. Allegretto furioso

III. Adagio (attacca)

IV. Allegretto - Andante

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 to reveal 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. String Quartet No. 10 premiered, together with String Quartet No. 9, in November 1964. A festival held earlier that same year to celebrate Shostakovich's work motivated the composer to write both in quick succession.

In the first movement, *Andante*, call and response patterns built from the compact opening motif continues throughout, creating textural contrasts and an oscillating movement that pre-empt the fourth movement. The regimented *Allegretto furioso*'s stabbing rhythms burst from the *Andante*'s delicate ending. The lyrical phrasing of the third movement *Adagio (attacca)* develops as eight variations on a passacaglia-bass begun by the cello. All the while sustained notes convey an underlying tension. Shostakovich returns to themes from each of the previous movements in the final movement to craft a complex and nuanced journey through the Tenth Quartet. The agitated melody and syncopation of this finale sweeps vibrantly across all the instruments' parts.

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2

Brahms first dipped his toes into the string quartet genre in the 1850s with the two works that comprise Opus 51. These quartets underwent many revisions until 1873, when he cautiously allowed it to be performed in Berlin by the Joachim Quartet and published. This second quartet of Opus 51 acknowledges Brahms' friendship with the violinist Joseph Joachim and their respective mottos of FA-E Fret, *aber einsam* (Free but lonely) and F-A-F *frei, aber froh* (Free but happy), and weaves them into the musical texture.

The sombre *Allegro* is rich and flowing, using both motto themes. The movement revels in polyphonic writing, particularly canons ('rounds') where the melody is imitated, played upside down and back to front. In the second movement, the first violin sings the *Andante* theme over a sinuous accompaniment from viola and cello. As these beautiful lines of melody continue, contrast comes with the first violin and cello cutting in abruptly in canon. The Minuet enjoys a calm, courtly grace until it is disturbed by two sparkling interludes. There is an impressive double canon between first violin and viola. The lively Hungarian czardas rhythm of the finale alternates with a waltz melody, and also balances well with the lyricism of the first movement. The coda starts quietly and builds to a brilliantly rousing ending.

Programme notes by Sarah Chesney, March 2019

History of the New Zealand String Quartet

Where to start? Few are not familiar with the New Zealand String Quartet - for more than 30 years the NZSQ have been this country's leading professional string quartet, playing hundreds of concerts here and overseas, teaching several generations of players and building up an impressive collection of albums.

They are touring on the Regional Roster for the first time in some years, and for the first time since appointing their dynamic new second violin Monique Lapins. They will also be touring with the newest member of the NZSQ, an Amati viola, made in Cremona in 1619 by Nicolo Amati and on indefinite loan from the Adam Foundation.

The New Zealand String Quartet is renowned for its versatility and has enjoyed collaborating with musicians from all over the globe, in a range of classical, jazz and world music genres. They will return to the Regional Series playing favourites from Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Shostakovich as well as the work *Bai sanxian*, by Jack Body. Jack worked with the members of the Quartet for several decades at the New Zealand School of Music. His output, which includes a great variety of forms from opera to electroacoustic compositions, often draws on an ability to take inspiration from non-western music such as Indonesian gamelan.

Much-loved by local audiences, the New Zealand String Quartet has performed to great acclaim in London's Wigmore Hall and the City of London Festival, in New York at the Frick Collection, and in Washington's Library of Congress Coolidge Auditorium. In addition to regular touring in the UK, Europe and North America, the Quartet has played in Mexico, Cura ao, Japan, Korea, and China. They have made many visits to Australia, including the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville and the Canberra International Music Festival.



Biographies

Born in Ithaca, New York to German parents, Helene Pohl spent her childhood on both sides of the Atlantic. At 17 she was accepted for tertiary study at the Musikhochschule Cologne. She continued her studies with members of the Cleveland Quartet at the Eastman School of Music and at Indiana University with Josef Gingold.

As first violinist of the San Francisco based Fidelio String Quartet (1988-1993), Helene performed extensively in the USA, Germany, England, Italy and South America. The Fidelio Quartet was prizewinner in the 1991 London International String Quartet Competition and quartet in residence at both the Tanglewood and Aspen Music Festivals.

Helene joined the New Zealand String Quartet as first violinist in February 1994. In 2001 she became Artistic Director, with fellow quartet member Gillian Ansell, of the Adam Chamber Music Festival. In 2014 she was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for her outstanding services to music in New Zealand.

Monique Lapins began her violin studies at the age of 6 with the Suzuki method and continued her studies at the Australian National Academy of Music under William Hennessy, and at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music under Professor Qian Zhou.

As a chamber musician, she has twice been a finalist in the Asia Pacific Chamber Music Competition and has participated in chamber music programmes and festivals in France, the Czech Republic, Holland, Japan, Hong Kong and Australia and at the prestigious Open Chamber Music Seminars in Prussia Cove in the UK. A former Emerging Artist with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Monique has toured extensively in collaboration with the Australian Chamber Orchestra Collective, the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. She has also performed under the baton of Seiji Ozawa in Japan and under Philippe Herreweghe in France. Monique joined the NZSQ in May 2016, replacing Douglas Beilman who was farewelled at the end of 2015 after 26 years with the New Zealand String Quartet.

Monique plays a 1784 Lorenzo Storioni violin, kindly loaned by Mr David Duncan Craig, as trustee of the Lily Duncan Trust.î

Gillian Ansell, born in Auckland, made her concerto debut as a violinist with the Auckland Philharmonia at the age of 16. At 19, an Associated

Board Scholarship took Gillian to the Royal College of Music in London for 3 years to study violin, viola and piano. She then won a German Academic Exchange (DAAD) scholarship for further study in Germany at the Musikhochschule Cologne with Igor Ozim and the Amadeus Quartet. After working professionally in London for three years she returned to New Zealand to become a founding member of the New Zealand String Quartet in 1987. She was second violinist for two years before taking up the position of violist of the group. In 2001 she became Artistic Director, with fellow quartet member Helene Pohl, of the Adam New Zealand Chamber Music Festival. In 2008 she was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for her outstanding services to music in New Zealand.

Gillian plays on a 1619 Nicolo Amati viola, generously loaned by the Adam Foundation.î

Rolf Gjelsten began cello studies in his native city Victoria, Canada, with James Hunter and Janos Starker at the age of 15. At 22 he became the youngest member of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra. Rolf returned to North America to study with Zara Nelsova which led to further study with the members of the La Salle, Hungarian, Vermeer, Cleveland and Emerson string quartets.

As a member of the Laurentian Quartet for almost a decade he toured internationally, made five CDs and taught cello at the prestigious Sarah Lawrence College in New York. During this time he was also a member of the New York Piano Trio.

Rolf furthered his studies from 1990 with the great Casals protégÈ and Beaux Arts Trio cellist Bernhard Greenhouse at Rutgers University, where he received his doctoral degree in cello. He has performed with such eminent artists as Menahem Pressler, Anton Kuerti, Piers Lane, Tasmin Little, Nobuko Imai and Gervaise de Peyer.

Rolf joined the New Zealand String Quartet in May 1994 and in 2014 he was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for his outstanding services to music in New Zealand.

Next Concert:

Mark Menzies & Gayle Blankenburg

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PERCUSSION



George Crumb: *Music for a Summer Evening* for two amplified pianos and percussion (2 players) (1974)
Claude Debussy: *En Blanc et noir* for two pianos; Steve Reich - *Nagoya Marimbas* for two Marimbas.

Tuesday 21st May 2019,

7.30pm, at The Piano 156 Armagh St, Chch

Tickets: Door Sales: \$45 (students \$20) Subject to availability,
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