

PROGRAMME NOTES

SOUNDSCAPES FOUR

Soundscapes Four is being performed at:

- Nelson Centre of Musical Arts in Nelson on Sunday 19 May, 7pm

Leonie Holmes (1962-) NZ

Fragments II (2016)

The original Fragment, also composed for String Quartet, was a kind of fantasia on a small, repeating pattern. This work, Fragment II, continues the idea of a response to a very small idea. The 'fragment' in this case is a rocking three-note passage, introduced by the cello. Opening softly and slowly, using the ascending intervals of a minor 6th then augmented 5th, the searching quality of the three notes prompts an introspective and whimsical exploration. The tension grows as the music speeds up into a twirling semiquaver interlude and the occasional use of ricochet bowing adds moments of subtle humour. The use of wide intervals and augmented harmonies create an atmosphere of beauty and poignancy.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

***String Quartet No. 14 in F sharp,
Op. 142*** (1872-73)

I. Allegretto

II. Adagio (attacca)

III. Allegretto

Shostakovich's Quartets 11 through 14 are dedicated to each member of the Beethoven Quartet, who worked through and premiered all except the first and the last of his 15 quartets. The members made up the inner circle of Shostakovich's most intimate and trusted friends. Having paid homage to the violinists and violist in Quartets 11-13, the composer began this work, his dedication to the cellist, Sergei Shirinsky, in 1972, taking 9 months to complete. The work is in three movements, in the traditional fast-slow-fast with a slow coda to end, but as in each of his quartets, the form and content unfold in their own ways. In each of these four quartets dedicated to members of the Beethoven Quartet one has to wonder, with so many idiosyncratic references to the dedicatees in the music, to what degree has the composer painted a personal portrait, and how much the character and emotional content of the work plays out as a reflection of the personal traits of each member? Shostakovich told the group that he wrote specifically with their

Cont. on next page...



Shostakovich string quartet cont. from previous page...

playing in mind. In the Fourteenth Quartet, the unusually jovial and playful character first introduced by the cello takes on a quirky effect with seemingly random dissonances in the accompanying material, becoming more blaring as the cello line dominates much of the movement. A reflection of the dynamic of the personalities working within the Quartet perhaps? In contrast, the second movement tells a dark and emotionally wrought narrative through sparse textures with variations and embellishments. The last movement contains several musical references to its dedicatee, spelling out Shirinsky's nickname Seryosha in the violin 1 pizzicato opening theme, as well as a quote of the beautiful "Seryosha" aria from 'Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District' in the deep cello line. In both the 2nd and 3rd movements there is also a beautiful duet line with the cello riding above the first violin, accompanied by heavy pizzicatos in Mahlerian fashion, which Shostakovich referred to as his 'Italian' bit. Is there some hidden reference to Shirinsky's tastes here? The last movement is a wild ride of contrasting textures and emotions, culminating in an apotheosis which, like many of Shostakovich's quartets, leaves the listener transfixed in deep contemplation.

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

***String Quartet No. 3 in B flat major,
Op. 67 (1875)***

I. Vivace

II. Andante

III. Agitato (Allegretto non troppo) – trio – coda

IV. Poco Allegretto con Variazioni

Brahms made a significant contribution to chamber music repertoire. In 1875, during his summer holidays at Ziegelhausen, near Heidelberg, he completed his Piano Quartet, Op. 60, and worked on his last string quartet, the Quartet in B flat major, Op. 67, published the following year with a dedication to Professor Theodor Wilhelm Engelmann, his host in Utrecht during a concert tour of Holland in January 1876.

The first movement of the quartet starts with a cheerful theme that soon allows the intrusion of crossrhythms. The second subject, appearing after a transition that touches on the minor, is a happy dance tune, and these elements form the substance of the central development and subsequent recapitulation. The F major slow movement introduces a moving and extended melody for the first violin,

Cont. on next page...



Brahms string quartet cont. from previous page...

followed by a middle section that brings moments of drama and changes of metre, with the return of the first theme prefigured in an apparent variation of what is to come. The muted D minor third movement, marked *Agitato*, in which the viola alone remains unmuted, offers thematic material of some intensity for that instrument, which plays a leading part also in the A minor Trio, to join in the gentle D major conclusion with the other instruments. The last movement brings a simple melody, followed by eight variations. The first of these is dominated by the viola, which starts the second variation. The third brings triplet figuration, the fourth a sombre opening for first violin and cello two octaves apart, the fifth a change of key to D flat major and the sixth a *molto dolce* G flat major. The seventh variation, in doubled speed, brings back the key and principal theme of the first movement, followed by a final variation that recalls the transitional material of the first movement, in B flat minor. The movement, the longest of the four, ends with a coda that combines elements of the seventh variation, and therefore the first movement, with the theme of the finale, a statement of perfect unity.



NEW ZEALAND
STRING QUARTET
TE RŌPŪ TŪRŪ O AOTEAROA

New Zealand String Quartet

www.nzsq.org.nz

nzsq@nzsq.org.nz

04 499 8883

