

PROGRAMME NOTES

SOUNDSCAPES TWO

Soundscapes Two is being performed at:

- The Regent Theatre in Dunedin on Saturday 11 May 2024, 4pm
- Whitehaven Room, ASB Theatre in Blenheim on Saturday 18 May 2024, 7.30pm



Our performance in *The Whitehaven Room* is generously supported by
Whitehaven Wines.

Claire Cowan (1983-) NZ

Celestia >< Terralia (2023)

Notes from the composer:

'We are stardust in the highest exalted way, called by the universe, reaching out to the universe' Ann Druyan

While writing this work, I have been fascinated by the mirrored connections and parallels between Earth and space, both physically and metaphorically. A musical idea begins in the mind as a fragment, which changes through repetition or 'orbits'. In space, the fragments of past ideas (space missions, defunct satellites, space junk) drift around Earth for all time, never to be part of a whole again. Deep below in the ocean currents, the lion's mane jellyfish is on its own passive journey. Its fiery- coloured underbelly mirrors the gas- filled space imagery captured by our most powerful telescopes. The micro and the macro reflect each other endlessly at the extreme ends of the spectrum.

Utilising minimalist musical techniques, the piece takes its energetic structure from the movements between Earth and space- the countdown to a rocket launch, the release of gravity as a return to the womb, and the profound perspective shift that comes with observing Earth from a great distance.

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

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Shostakovich String Quartet #14 cont. from previous page...

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 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

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Brahms String Quartet #3 cont. from previous page...

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, 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.



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