



Blackheath
Chamber
Music
Festival



GOLDNER STRING QUARTET
with
ORAVA QUARTET

Sunday 21 April 2023, 5:30 pm
Phillips Hall | Blackheath Blue Mountains NSW

Dene Olding | violin
Daniel Kowalik | violin
Dimity Hall | violin
David Dalseno | violin
Irina Morozova | viola
Thomas Chawner | viola
Julian Smiles | cello
Karol Kowalik | cello

PROGRAM NOTES

Harry SDRAULIG [1992-] | Octet for strings [2018]

“This piece was commissioned for Musica Viva Australia by Geoff Stearn, and premiered at the 2018 Huntington Estate Music Festival by the Goldner and Orava Quartets. It is scored for a standard string octet of four violins, two violas and two cellos.

“Though cast in a single continuous movement, the Octet contains several clearly identifiable sections. At the outset, a sinewy progression of block chords is heard which becomes the motto theme of the whole work. From this, an agitated viola solo appears as the atmosphere becomes increasingly foreboding. Before long, the music breaks out into an inferno of unrelenting energy and drive, shifting with agitation between differing solo and ensemble textures. After a considerable climax, ideas begin to fragment – the tempo slows to a mood recalling the opening and, after a reflective return of the viola solo, the music winds down to silence.

“From this emerges a long oasis of calm and tonal purity. Lyrical solo lines interweave with transparent harmonies although there are moments of shadow too. After a state of complete tranquillity is reached, scattered pizzicati herald a return

of the earlier frenzy as the piece tumbles towards its cataclysmic finale.” – Harry Sdraulig

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Felix MENDELSSOHN [1809-1847] | Octet in E-flat major Opus 20 [1825]

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Felix Mendelssohn was just 16 years old when he wrote the String Octet in E-flat major, Op.20. It was written with such mature musical understanding that it gave him the reputation of the greatest prodigy in the history of Western Music, surpassing even Mozart. The original score is for a double string quartet with four violins, two violas and two cellos. Mendelssohn dedicated the Octet to his violin teacher Eduard Rietz and also wrote in the score: “This Octet must be played by all the instruments in symphonic orchestral style. Pianos and fortes must be strictly observed and more strongly emphasized than is usual in pieces of this character.”

On the upper right corner of original score, in Mendelssohn's hand, are seen the letters “L. e. G.” – an abbreviation of the German, “Lass es geling, Gott” (“Let it succeed, God!”). A more mature Mendelssohn substantially edited the score before its final publication in 1832. The habit of revising his works again and again, became a lifelong obsession with Mendelssohn, much to the exasperation of his publishers.

The work comprises four movements in the classical style, both symphonic and intimate:

i. **Allegro moderato ma con fuoco** (E-flat major)

This movement, in typical sonata form of contrasting themes, development, recapitulation and coda, features the first violin in a virtuosic way.

ii. **Andante** (C minor)

This wistful and poignant slow movement explores ever changing moods and textures. Longing, hope and despair walking side by side.

iii. **Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo** (G minor)

“The whole piece is to be played staccato and pianissimo with shivering tremolos and lightning flashes of trills. All is new, strange and yet so familiar and pleasing – one feels close to the world of spirits, carried away in the air, half inclined to snatch up a broomstick and follow the aerial procession ...and at the end... all has vanished.” – Fanny Mendelssohn (sister).

Mendelssohn is said to have been inspired to write this enchanted movement by a section of Goethe's lyric poem, *Faust*, titled *Walpurgis Night's Dream*.

*Wisps of cloud and mist
Are lit from above*

*Breeze in the foliage and wind in the reeds
And all is scattered.*

iv. **Presto** (E-flat major)

The finale begins with a swift eight-part fugue, with wisps of the Scherzo lingering in the air from time to time. Mendelssohn also quotes the melody, “And he shall reign forever and ever” from the *Hallelujah Chorus* of Handel's *Messiah*, whilst relentlessly driving the presto to an exhilarating end.

German composer and violinist, Louis Spohr, praised Mendelssohn's Octet as “quite another kind of art”. Even the composer himself regarded it highly, describing it as, “my favourite of all my compositions. I had a most wonderful time in the writing of it!”