

MUSICA VIVA AUSTRALIA



Goldner String Quartet & Bernadette Harvey





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CLASSIC



Program

Mon 15 Nov, 7pm | Sat 20 Nov, 2pm
City Recital Hall

Mon 22 Nov, 7:30pm
Newcastle City Hall

Bernadette Harvey *piano*

Goldner String Quartet

Dene Olding AM *violin*

Dimity Hall *violin*

Irina Morozova *viola*

Julian Smiles *cello*

Antonin DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96 'American' (1893) 30 min

- I *Allegro ma non troppo*
- II *Lento*
- III *Molto vivace*
- IV *Finale: Vivace ma non troppo*

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44 (1842) 30 min

- I *Allegro brillante*
- II *In modo d'una marcia. Un poco largamente*
- III *Scherzo: Molto vivace*
- IV *Allegro, ma non troppo*

With special thanks to our Ensemble Patrons Stephen and Michele Johns and Anonymous for their support of this tour. And to our Concert Champions: Kim Williams AM and Catherine Dovey, and Kay Vernon.

About the Music

Dvořák's biography is notable for its gentle pleasures of pigeon-fancying, trainspotting, early-morning nature walks, and having his numerous family around him. It's a far cry from the scandalous lifestyle of many contemporaneous composers. But it was not without passion: for his country, his native language, and for music.

In 1891 he had an offer he couldn't refuse: the wealthy Mrs Jeanette Thurber lured him away from his beloved home to be Director of her Conservatory in New York. He would, she hoped, inspire a new school of American composition. She made an interesting choice. People think that Dvořák quotes lots of folk tunes, but in truth it's more common to find just a glimpse of one, which set him off down his own original path. Mrs Thurber may have hoped that he would imbue some of her students with a similar ability to absorb the musical elements around them, and develop them into individual artistic statements.

New York was interesting, but the homesick composer found the social expectations difficult and tiring. He would go to look at the pigeons in the Central Park Zoo, and went down to the harbour to examine the steamships in the way he used to catalogue steam trains, but it wasn't the same. The other sore spot was that he and his wife Anna had left four of their children behind, bringing only two with them.

By June 1893 Dvořák needed a holiday. His young assistant suggested a journey half-way across America – mostly by train, of course – to Spillville, Iowa, which

had a large number of Czech immigrants. The other four Dvořák children came out from Europe for this summer interlude. It was a happy one, for the composer at least. Almost everyone spoke his beloved native language, his family was reunited, he could play Czech hymns in the church, and apart from a lack of pigeons and trains it was all very relaxing. Over a mere two weeks or so of that June, Dvořák was inspired to sketch out a sunny string quartet in F major.

It has become known as the 'American', but really it is pure Bohemia, the artistic statement of a Czech man who finds himself in a foreign land. Musicologists continue to argue over whether he included musical references to Native American or African American melodies. The Quartet opens with a wonderfully strong theme which due to its pentatonic mode, to some ears may actually sound a little 'Hollywood Asian'. (Pentatonic means five-note, as though he was just using the black notes of the piano.) But this is a common feature of much folk music around the world, and sounds just as much Czech as anything else. It's nice that Dvořák, himself a violist, gives this excellent opening line to the viola; later he relents and gives the first violin a good bit too, introducing the closing theme of the exposition. The violin also offers a beautiful though poignant theme in the lilting second movement, taken up by the cello. It hints at the blues, its haunting atmosphere lingering to the last shimmering chord.

Most agree that a real American motif is to be found in the third movement – that of a local birdcall, most likely the Scarlet

Tanager, heard during one of Dvořák's morning nature walks with his wife. 'Scherzo' is often translated as meaning a joke, but this one has a rather earnest character, reinforced by the minor key of the Trio sections.

The catchy rhythms and cheerful busyness of the Finale have suggested the railway to more than one listener. Perhaps this potent air of optimism which hangs over at least three of the movements is part of what endears this Quartet so strongly to New World listeners, reflecting how they would like to see themselves.

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The early 1840s were productive and exciting years for **Schumann**. In 1840, following an acrimonious legal battle with his teacher, and unwilling future father-in-law, Friedrich Wieck, Schumann had married his beloved Clara. Inspired and encouraged by her, he turned his attention from the solo piano music that had dominated his output to compose songs, orchestral works and, particularly in 1842, chamber music; the three String Quartets Op 41, the Piano Quartet Op 47, the first version of the Fantasiestücke Op 88 and the Piano Quintet Op 44, which was written during September and October.

Schumann's was the first Piano Quintet that can truly be called great, and it did much to establish his name as a composer. Clara, the Quintet's dedicatee, was delighted. However, owing to her ill health at the time of the work's private

premiere on 6 December, Schumann's friend Mendelssohn stepped in to play the demanding piano part at sight, although Clara participated in the first public performance on 8 January 1843. Extraordinarily, the Quintet gained the approbation of Berlioz, who himself wrote no chamber music and was critical Mendelssohn.

Liszt, who unexpectedly visited the Schumanns in Leipzig, remarked condescendingly, 'No, no, my dear Schumann, this is not the real thing: it is only Kapellmeister music.' This opinion and some disparaging remarks about Mendelssohn greatly offended Schumann, yet Liszt's oblique reference to the influence of JS Bach was not wholly wide of the mark. Robert and Clara had together enjoyed playing and analysing The Well-Tempered Clavier. 'Our fugal studies continue,' she noted in her diary. 'Every time we play one it becomes more interesting for me. Such great art with such a natural flow.'

The Piano Quintet has affinities with the seventh prelude and fugue from Book 1, with which it shares its key and, possibly also the distinctive pair of upward-leaping intervals with which it opens. But where Bach achieves a yearning mood, Schumann's approach is much bolder and extroverted, exploring a wider range of emotional ground overall.

The first movement weaves two prominent themes, the striding pair of rising intervals and a more lyrical second subject, into a tightly argued yet expansive Sonata-allegro in which the piano contributes to the rich Romantic

instrumental textures of the four strings with ebullient interplay. There is scarcely a bar in which the piano is not heard, yet its part is completely integrated into the whole.

The second movement has a somewhat Schubertian melancholy while foreshadowing the unstable mood of Mahler's funereal marches. Its halting opening theme, *poco largamente*, is twice interrupted, first by a more lyrical passage, then by an *agitato* section. Despite these contrasts, the entire movement is unified by Schumann's ingenious thematic development.

A dashing Scherzo unleashes much excitement with energetically running scales, again twice interrupted by contrasting passages. The first Trio is lyrical in character, the second has

a muscular folk character resembling Beethoven or Brahms in bucolic mood. Mendelssohn had suggested that the second Trio should be 'something livelier' than Schumann had originally composed.

Perhaps following the example of Mendelssohn, whose String Quartet in E-flat major Op 13 had played the same trick, the Finale opens away from the home key of the work, returning to it at the end when the main theme from the opening movement is recalled. Schumann caps this sonata rondo, in which elements from the preceding movements are brilliantly developed, with a double fugue. Unsurprisingly, many more are inclined to agree with Clara, than with Liszt, that this is 'magnificent – a work filled with energy and freshness'.

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Meet the Artists



Bernadette Harvey

Bernadette Harvey is Senior Lecturer in Piano at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. An acclaimed international performer and teacher, she was awarded the Centenary Medal in 2000 by then Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, for her contribution to Australian music. Dr Harvey has won many accolades since her first medal in a Sydney Eisteddfod at the age of two and a half, including the ABC Young Performer of the Year in 1987.

As guest artist for the past eleven years at the Tucson Winter Chamber Music Festival in Tucson, Arizona, she has worked with such artists as Ani Kavafian, Joseph Lin, Antonio Lysy, Paul Coletti,

Alan Vogel and David Schifrin. She presented the world premiere there of a piano quintet by Pierre Jalbert and performed with the Tokyo Quartet in Carl Vine's Piano Quintet, *Fantasia*, premiered in 2013 with the Shanghai Quartet in Tucson and again in Australia for the Melbourne Festival in October 2013. She and the Shanghai Quartet presented the Australian premiere of the Bright Sheng Piano Quintet, *Dance Capriccio*, and more recently she has released a CD, *Alchemy*, with the famous Jupiter Quartet, recorded in 2019 for the Canadian label Marquis, and presently being nominated for a Grammy Award.

Bernadette Harvey performs regularly as a Musica Viva Artist in Australia and with the ABC. She has had several new piano concertos written for her, including *Rubia* by Melbourne composer Tim Dargaville which she premiered in Melbourne with the Academy of Melbourne Orchestra, and by Ross Edwards, and Donald Hollier. She recently gave the Australian premiere of *Night*, the first piano concerto by her American colleague Kevin Puts, performed with the Llewellyn Sinfonia, conducted by her sister Rowan Harvey-Martin in Canberra.



Goldner String Quartet

Having celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2020, the Goldner String Quartet has longstanding recognition, not only as Australia's pre-eminent string quartet but as an ensemble of international significance, favourably compared with the best in the world.

Launched in 1995 and still retaining all founding members, the Quartet is named after Richard Goldner, founder of Musica Viva Australia. The musicians are well known to Australian and international audiences through their performances and recordings and for their concurrent membership of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW. All have occupied principal positions in organisations such as the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Unanimous audience and critical acclaim following its Wigmore Hall debut in 1997 ensured the Quartet's invitations to prestigious UK and European festivals. Performances in the USA and throughout Asia have followed, in addition to several tours of New Zealand. The Quartet's appearances in the 2011 City of London Festival drew capacity audiences and unanimous praise from UK critics, and were broadcast on the BBC.

The Quartet regularly appears at many of Australia's leading music festivals including Music in the Hunter, in addition to being Quartet in Residence at the annual Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville. The Quartet has also made many appearances at the Musica Viva Festival and the Huntington Estate Music Festival, and enjoyed outstanding success at the 2017 Adam Chamber Music Festival, in Nelson, NZ. More recently the Quartet has toured the UK, and performed in Italy for the opening of the 2019 Biennale Arte in Venice.

Strongly committed to teaching the next generation of string quartets, the Goldner String Quartet has mentored young ensembles through programs of the Australian Youth Orchestra, Musica Viva Australia and the Sydney Conservatorium. New works have been regularly commissioned for the Quartet from many of Australia's leading composers.

The Goldner String Quartet was first presented by Musica Viva in 1995, as part of the company's 50th Anniversary Gala. Its first national tour was in 1997 and since then the Quartet has appeared for Musica Viva many times, in mainstage concerts, festivals and several morning series.

MUSICA VIVA AUSTRALIA



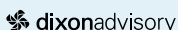
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Bernadette Harvey, Harry Bennetts & Miles Mullin-Chivers



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