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Piers Lane & Ensemble Q String Quartet





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Program

Thursday, 7 October 2021, 7pm
Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University

Piers Lane *piano*
Natsuko Yoshimoto *violin*
Anne Horton *violin*
Imants Larsens *viola*
Trish Dean *cello*

Karol SZYMANOWSKI (1882-1937)

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 56 (1927) 21 min

- I *Moderato*
- II *Vivace, scherzando*
- III *Lento*

Lili BOULANGER (1893-1918)

Thème et variations (1911-14) 10 min

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Piano Quintet in F minor, op 34 (1864) 41 min

- I *Allegro non troppo*
- II *Andante, un poco adagio*
- III *Scherzo: Allegro*
- IV *Finale: Poco sostenuto – Allegro non troppo – Presto, non troppo*

With special thanks to our Ensemble Patron the Berg Family Foundation
for its support of this concert. And to our Concert Champions Ian and Cass George.

About the Music

Szymanowski was an exact contemporary of Stravinsky and a year younger than Bartók. He was a key figure in the rebirth of Polish music in the early years of the 20th century. In the earlier part of his career, he was influenced by Chopin, Scriabin, Wagner and Strauss, and visits to Sicily and Africa in 1901-11 and 1914 strengthened the fascination that Arabic culture had already begun to exert over him, and which found its expression notably in his third, choral, Symphony. Szymanowski's other compositions include two operas (Nagith and Król Roger), two violin concertos, numerous works for piano and violin and piano, and two string quartets. The first of these dates from 1917, the second from 1927; it was performed in Paris in 1929, but it is not certain whether this was its première. The first of its three movements is in ternary form, with a lyrical main theme first presented by first violin and cello in octaves, against a shimmering accompaniment. (The frequent use of tremolo, trills, harmonics, pizzicato and sul ponticello here and elsewhere in the quartet gives the music much of its highly individual flavor.) There is a free, rhapsodic middle section, followed by a surprisingly literal reprise. The second movement is a brilliant vigorous scherzo, with a dark, brooding 'trio' and a varied reprise. The slow movement comes last, and is largely fugal in style, except for its central 'development'. The initial fugue subject is played in diminution and with the rhythmic scheme varied, and it is this second exposition which forms the basis of the agitated recapitulation.

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Despite succumbing to a chronic illness at the young age of 24, **Lili Boulanger** achieved an extraordinary degree of compositional success in a field that is

still dominated by men to this day. As the younger sister of Nadia and daughter of conductor Ernest Boulanger, it could be said that the Boulangers were musical royalty (especially considering that Lili's mother was a Russian princess). Lili Boulanger's musical aptitude became evident at the age of two when Gabriel Fauré, a friend of the family, discovered that she had perfect pitch. By the age of five, she was regularly accompanying her sister to music theory classes at the Paris Conservatoire and a few years later Lili was studying not only music theory at the Conservatoire, but also piano, organ, violin, cello, and harp.

Her breakthrough as a composer came when she won the Prix de Rome composition prize in 1913 at the age of 19. Her father had won the award 78 years previously and she was determined to bring it back into the Boulanger family after his death in 1900. Nadia had given up on the competition after four unsuccessful attempts, so not only did the award allow Lili to be taken seriously as a composer in her own right, but it also made her the first female winner in the award's 110-year history.

It was around this time that Boulanger began working on her *Thème et variations* for solo piano, with some suggesting it may have originated as a study for the competition. Lili was greatly affected by the death of her father, and as such, many of her compositions feature themes of grief and loss. These emotions are evident in this work: after the theme is stated in the right hand, the first variation begins with the performance direction 'with grandeur, but dark, painful', and the heavy minor chords that follow are reminiscent of the opening of Chopin's Funeral March. The

subsequent variations grow increasingly urgent and dissonant. While the entire piece is in C Minor, it transitions through other keys frequently and is an excellent demonstration of the colourful harmony that Lili Boulanger is remembered for, and that Claude Debussy described as 'undulating with grace.' The piece is elegant at times, as with the flowing triplets of the 4th variation, and often triumphant, as with the forceful chords of the 5th variation, but an impression of the composer's grief remains pervasive throughout.

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Brahms liked nothing more than composing chamber music, as the statistics show: a repertoire of 24 major pieces, more than any of the main composers since Beethoven. The appeal of chamber music for Brahms was its audience – not in quantity, but let's say, in quality. When writing chamber music, Brahms was writing for a select group, made up of people who credited themselves with a superior musical intelligence upon which to build their appreciation. Brahms could write for these people secure in the knowledge that they would understand the intelligence in his music, allowing him to try things out before exposing himself in the more public forums of symphony concerts, and helping him to strive for perfection of form and content.

In a classic example of the long gestations for which Brahms is notorious, the Piano Quintet took a circuitous route to find its ideal expression. It started out in 1862 as a string quintet on the model of Schubert's, with an extra cello added to the normal string quartet formation. His friends and advisors responded with enthusiasm, but the violinist Joseph Joachim, whose opinion Brahms esteemed, confessed after

playing it a few times that it needed a lift in texture: 'What I miss in it for unalloyed pleasure is, to pinpoint it in a single phrase, an attractive sonority... The instrumentation is not energetic enough to my ears to convey the powerful rhythmic convulsions; the sound is almost helplessly thin for the musical thought. Then again for long stretches everything lies too thickly.'

Brahms reconfigured the piece for two pianos, but was still dissatisfied on this question of sonority, and gave the piece a third incarnation bringing together the best of both worlds: combining piano with strings. The Piano Quintet was essentially a new kind of chamber music formation, an innovation of Brahms' hero Robert Schumann. The idea of a piano blending on an equal expressive footing with a string quartet had become a more attractive possibility with the dramatic improvements to the concert grand's sonority and depth which developed in the 1860s. For Brahms, this formation addressed precisely the concerns of Joachim, lending the piece the desired combination of force and lyricism.

The greatness of the Piano Quintet derives from the wealth of intelligent musical invention it contains. The first movement, in sonata form, begins with a short exposition which contains the statements of a declamatory first theme and a contrasting sensitive an lyrical second theme. These are then 'put through the wringer' of development, Brahms concocting and exploring an extensive chain of different treatments of this material, shifting between lingering reflection and accelerating outbursts, before the opening is recounted in the recapitulation. Brahms then gives himself some extra scope for free development by appending a coda which builds from a meditative texture to a concluding flourish.

Brahms treats his structural outlines even more freely in the other movements, reinforcing the observation that these are simply devices for guiding the composer's imagination. The second movement's 'song without words' melody is stated by the piano before the strings respond, building a sustained reflection on this noble phrase. The piano takes the lead in unleashing the gusto of the concertlike Scherzo, while the strings set a haunting, deeply expressive mood to introduce the

Finale. Here Brahms gives free rein to his skill in the method Schoenberg described as 'developing variation', characterised by rich, endless invention upon motivic cells and melodic elements. The movement traverses a broad palette of emotional characters and intensity, from rustic jauntness to Romantic expressionism, before building to its impetuous climax.

The Piano Quintet was premiered in 1866 at the Leipzig Conservatorium. Brahms' associate, the conductor Hermann Levi, who had played through the two-piano version with Clara Schumann and who had also been in Baden-Baden in 1864, declared, upon hearing it in its final form: 'The quintet is beautiful beyond measure: no-one who didn't know it in its earlier forms – string quintet and sonata – would believe that it was conceived and written for other instruments. Not a single note gives me the impression of an arrangement: all the ideas have a much more succinct colour. Out of the monotony of the two pianos, a model of tonal beauty has arisen; out of a piano duo accessible to only a few musicians, a restorative for every musiclover – a masterpiece of chamber music.'

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MUSICA VIVA AUSTRALIA



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Meet the Artists

Piers Lane



London-based Australian pianist Piers Lane is one of the most inquisitive and engaging live performers of his generation. In great demand as soloist and collaborative artist, recent highlights include a performance of the Busoni Piano Concerto at Carnegie Hall, premieres of Carl Vine's Second Piano Concerto, written for him, with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and a sold-out performance of Chopin's complete Nocturnes at the Wigmore Hall.

Five times soloist at the BBC Proms in London's Royal Albert Hall, Piers Lane's concerto repertoire exceeds 90 works and has led to engagements with many of the world's great orchestras including the BBC orchestras, the major Australian symphony orchestras, the American, Bournemouth and Gothenburg Symphony Orchestras, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, City of London Sinfonia, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, among many others.

Piers Lane is in great demand as a collaborative artist. He continues his longstanding partnerships with violinist Tasmin Little, clarinettist Michael Collins

and the Goldner String Quartet. He has performed extensively with singers Cheryl Barker, Peter Coleman-Wright, Yvonne Kenny and Markus Schäfer, and has collaborated with Anne Sofie von Otter and Bengt Forsberg, Brett Dean, the Australian, Doric, Kodály, Medici, New Budapest, New Zealand, Pražák and RTÉ Vanbrugh String Quartets, and pianists Marc-André Hamelin, Hamish Milne, Kathryn Stott and Kathron Sturrock.

Piers Lane has written and presented over 100 programmes for BBC Radio 3, including the popular 54-part series *The Piano*. He holds an Honorary Doctorate from Griffith University in Australia. He was recently presented with the first medal from the Laza Kostić fund for promoting Serbian culture during difficult political times in the late 90s. In 1994, he was made an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music, where he was a Professor from 1989 to 2007.

He is President of the European Piano Teachers' Association UK, Artistic Director of the Sydney International Piano Competition, Patron of the Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference, the Old Granary Studio in Norfolk, the Tait Memorial Trust in London, the Youth Music Foundation of Australia and the Music Teachers' Association and the Accompanists' Guild in Queensland. He is a Trustee of the Hattori Foundation in London and Vice-President of Putney Music Club. In the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Birthday Honours, he was made an Officer in the Order of Australia (AO) for distinguished services to the arts as pianist, mentor and organiser.

Piers Lane first appeared for Musica Viva in 1996, in Newcastle. He has since appeared for Musica Viva on many occasions, including several national tours.

Natsuko Yoshimoto



Born in Japan, Natsuko Yoshimoto studied at the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Royal Northern College of Music in England and at Curtis Institute of Music in the States. Natsuko has been in great demand as a chamber musician, soloist and a concertmaster and has held positions as a leader of the Australian String Quartet, Grainger Quartet, Emperor Piano Trio and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

She is currently a member of Ensemble Q and is the Co-Concertmaster with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. She has given many world premieres of works by Australia's most prominent composers and has recorded for Virgin Classics, ABC Classics, Melba Records and Tall Poppies.

Natsuko plays on a Giovanni Battista Guaragnini generously on loan from the South Australia Guaragnini Violin Trust and Ukaria.

Anne Horton



Anne Horton has established an outstanding reputation both nationally and internationally as a member of the Tankstream Quartet, which won several prestigious awards including First prize in the Cremona and Osaka International String Quartet Competitions. Anne has performed in Hamburg, Berlin, London, Paris, Copenhagen, Cologne, Zagreb, Budapest, Belgrade, Frankfurt, throughout Italy and in New York.

As a member of Tankstream which later became the Australian String Quartet (ASQ), Anne has broadcast extensively in Australia on ABC Classic FM and featured on Radio France, North German Radio, BBC and televised in Austria, Denmark and Japan. During her time with ASQ she released several albums for ABC Classic FM including works of Debussy, Ravel and Schubert, and recently recorded an album with 'Artaria'.

Born in Perth, Anne holds a Bachelor and Master of Music Performance from The Australian Institute of Music in Sydney, where she studied under the tutelage of Alice Waten. She undertook further studies in the chamber music class directed by the Alban Berg Quartet at the Cologne Hochschule fur Musik. A dedicated violin teacher and tutor, including sessional teaching at Griffith University.

Anne has enjoyed successful artistic collaborations with many highly acclaimed performers including Angela Hewitt, Sarah MacLIVER, Li-Wei, Teddy Tahu Rhodes and Piers Lane. Artistic Associate at Camerata and a core member of Ensemble Q. She performs regularly with Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Ensemble Trivium.

Imants Larsens



Born in Switzerland, Australian violinist/violist Imants Larsens began playing the violin at the age of three in Adelaide, studying first with his grandmother Alita Larsens, then with Keith Crellin.

He continued his studies at the Musikhochschule Zentralschweiz in Lucerne under the guidance of his father Gunars Larsens, graduating with Lehrdiplom and Konzertreifeiplom degrees with distinction. Whilst in Europe, Imants participated actively in masterclasses with renowned musicians, including Pinchas Zukerman and the Vermeer Quartet.

Imants has won numerous awards and prizes in competitions both in Australia and overseas. He has performed as a soloist with orchestras in France, Switzerland and Australia and has appeared in numerous international festivals. Imants was concertmaster for national and South East Asia tours of Don Giovanni with CoOpera and also toured Europe with the Australian Youth Orchestra and was concertmaster when the AYO performed with the Cat Empire.

Imants moved to Brisbane in 2019 to take up the position of Principal Viola with Queensland Symphony Orchestra, having previously held the position of Associate Principal Viola with Adelaide Symphony

Orchestra since 2008. He has performed as guest Principal Viola with the Sydney, Tasmanian, West Australian and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras. Career highlights include performing as a soloist on numerous occasions with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, including Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante with Mark Wigglesworth conducting, as well as performing the Mendelssohn Octet and Tchaikovsky's Souvenir de Florence with Pinchas Zukerman.

Imants plays on a 1937 Arthur E Smith viola.

Trish Dean



Tasmanian-born cellist Trish Dean (formerly O'Brien) is the Co-Artistic Director and cellist of Ensemble Q.

She has been engaged as Acting Principal Cellist for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Guest Principal for the Adelaide and Queensland Symphony Orchestras, and held the position of Associate Principal for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra during the 1990s. In 2021 she performs with the Australian World Orchestra.

Her Artistic Director positions include a four-year contract with the Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium, where she

founded and developed a chamber music academy, the Coramba Chamber Music Festival and a highly successful concert series. Prior to that she was Artistic Director of the Camden Haven Music Festival, which under her direction won an APRA Award for Outstanding Contribution to Australian Music in a Regional Area.

Several Australian composers, including Paul Dean, Matthew Hindson and Elena Kats-Chernin, have written works for her, and her Australian premiere performance of the Myaskovsky Sonata no 2 for Cello and Piano and Prokofiev's Sonata for Solo Cello were broadcast on ABC Classic.

Trish has presented masterclasses across Australia and has taught for the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, the Australian Youth Orchestra, Sydney Conservatorium of Music and for several regional conservatoriums. She is passionate about creating opportunities for young musicians and is a driving force behind the Ensemble Q mentorship program.



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