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SPRING CONCERTS 2022

The Danish String Quartet

Sunday April 24 2022

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

Although the Danish String Quartet reopened our live, in-person performances after an 18-month hiatus, that wonderful concert, held at the Orpheum Theatre last October, feels like it was aeons ago.

It was the first in the Danish String Quartet's series of four "Doppelgänger" concerts, centred around the late quartets of Franz Schubert with specially commissioned new works by four renowned composers: Bent Sørensen, Lotta Wennäkoski, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, and Thomas Adès.

Today's concert is the second in the series and includes Finnish composer Lotta Wennäkoski's "Pige", inspired by Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" quartet.

We would like to thank the Peak Group of Companies for supporting our entire season, and Poul and Judith Hansen for sponsoring this afternoon's performance by "the Danes", as we call them.

We are most grateful to the City of Vancouver for its support and to all of you who are brave enough to come to the theatre. As promised, we are staying at 50% capacity for the remainder of the 2021-22 season.

Although masks are no longer mandated, we shall not look askance if you wear one. We want you to feel comfortable and enjoy the performance.

Most sincerely,

Leila



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The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，感谢您的合作。

Program

The Danish String Quartet

Frederik Øland (violin)

Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen (violin)

Asbjørn Nørgaard (viola)

Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin (cello)

Sunday, April 24, 2022 3:00 pm

Vancouver Playhouse

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

String Quartet No. 14 in D minor D. 810 (Death and the Maiden)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo. Allegro molto

Presto

[approx. 40 minutes]

INTERMISSION

LOTTA WENNÄKOSKI (b. 1970)

Pige

Vorüber, ach, vorüber!

Daktylus

Pigen og scrapbogen

(das Mädchen und das Scrapbuch)

[approx. 21 minutes]

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Death and the Maiden

(arr. Danish String Quartet)

[approx. 2 minutes]

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The Danish String Quartet

Early Life & Education: Violinists Frederik Øland and Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen and violist Asbjørn Nørgaard met as children at a music summer camp where they played soccer and made music together. As teenagers, they began the study of classical chamber music and were mentored by Tim Frederiksen of Copenhagen's Royal Danish Academy of Music. In 2008, the three Danes were joined by Norwegian cellist Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin and the Danish String Quartet was formed.



Photo credit: Caroline Bittencourt

This Season: In 2021-2022, the Danish String Quartet introduces *Doppelgänger*, an ambitious 4-year international commissioning project.

Doppelgänger pairs world premieres from four renowned composers – Bent Sørensen, Lotta Wennäkoski, Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, and Thomas Adès – with four major works from the masterful chamber music repertoire of Schubert. The *Doppelgänger* pieces are commissioned by the Danish String Quartet with the support of Carnegie Hall, Cal Performances, UC Santa Barbara Arts & Lectures, Vancouver Recital Society, Flagey in Brussels, and Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam.

Recordings: Since its debut in 2002, the Danish String Quartet has demonstrated a special affinity for Scandinavian composers, from Carl Nielsen to Hans Abrahamsen, alongside the music of Mozart and Beethoven. The Quartet's musical interests also encompass Nordic folk music, which is the focus of *Wood Works*, an album of traditional Scandinavian folk music released by DaCapo in 2014. As a follow-up, they released *Last Leaf*, an album of traditional Scandinavian folk music for ECM.

Awards & Prizes: The Quartet has received numerous awards and prizes, including First Prizes in the Vagn Holmboe String Quartet Competition and the Charles Hennen International Chamber Music Competition in the Netherlands, as well as the Audience Prize at the Trondheim International String Quartet Competition in 2005.

In 2009, the Danish String Quartet won First Prize in the 11th London International String Quartet Competition, now known as the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet competition. The Quartet was awarded the 2010 NORDMETALL-Ensemble Prize at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival in Germany, and, in 2011, they received the Carl Nielsen Prize, the highest cultural honour in Denmark.

The Danish String Quartet is currently exclusive with ECM Records and has previously recorded for DaCapo and Cavi-Music/BR Klassik

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Lotta Wennäkoski

Finnish composer Lotta Wennäkoski began her musical education studying violin in Budapest before taking up studies in composition, first at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and then at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, studying under composer Louis Andriessen.

Having begun her career writing scores for short films and for radio plays, her compositional instincts tend towards the picturesque and the accessible, with textures immediately understandable in terms of musical gesture. She is the diametrical opposite of a 'brutalist' composer, preferring to lure rather than berate the listener and she has even been called a 'lyricist' amongst contemporary composers.

While she enjoys an international reputation, having received commissions from conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen as well as from the BBC Symphony, she also likes to perform at daycare centres, singing songs with the children and explaining to them the language of modern music.

As a composer of both string music and songs, she is uniquely qualified to compose a work responding to Schubert's lied *Death and the Maiden*, especially since many of her compositions for voice deal with issues affecting women. Among these are her song cycle *Naisen rakkautta ja elämää* (The Love and Life of a Woman) from 2003, based on Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben* song collection, and her recent opera project, *Regine* (2021), about the wife of Danish philosopher Søren Kirkegaard.

She describes herself as a *timbral* composer, with a fascination for changes in tone colour. Slip-slidy glissandi are a recurring feature in her string scores and her music often has a strong sense of pulse, communicated in ostinato patterns, against the background of which melodic fragments poke out on the surface of the texture.

Most importantly, her music is fundamentally optimistic in outlook: "I belong", she says, "to a generation of composers who see the outside world as an opportunity rather than as a threat."



Lotta Wennäkoski
photo by Fennica Gehrman Maarit Kytöharju

Program Notes

Franz Schubert

String Quartet No. 14 in D minor D. 810 (Death and the Maiden)

Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" string quartet is a sombre work, with all four of its movements set in a minor key. It takes its name from the composer's lied *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (1817) that provides the theme for the quartet's slow movement, a set of variations. The poem's depiction of Death coming to claim a young life may well have had personal resonance for the 27-year-old Schubert, since in 1824, when this quartet was written, symptoms of the disease that would kill him four years later had already begun to appear.

Despite the despairing backstory, or perhaps because of it, the first movement of this quartet is unusually muscular in its scoring, thick with double-stop accompaniment patterns and punchy triple- and quadruple-stop chords at important cadences. This orchestral quality is evident from the startling salvo of string sound that opens the work, comparable in its dramatic abruptness to the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. This fanfare-like call to attention announces the serious tone of the movement while at the same time introducing the descending triplet figure that will be the principal motive of its first theme, presented immediately following. The other important motive dominating the movement arrives in the work's second theme: a small grouping of notes ending in a lilting dotted rhythm, lovingly offered up in thirds, Viennese-style.

Schubert's treatment of these two motives in this movement displays his more 'relaxed' notion of the structural principles underlying classical sonata form. While composers in the era of Mozart and Haydn considered their key choices and modulation patterns to be the harmonic pillars and load-bearing walls of a sonata-form movement's musical architecture, Schubert, by contrast, was more interested in interior decorating than structural engineering. Rejecting sonata form's traditional concentration on just two tonal centres – the home key presented at the outset and its alternate, presented in the second theme – he preferred to spin his tonal colour wheel more freely so as to choose just the right tonal accent for this little motive here, and the right tonal shade to paint that broad thematic space there.

While not ignoring the form's three-part division into exposition, development and recapitulation, Schubert lets this pattern out at the seams to create a more vibrant palette of harmonic possibilities. The tonal drama that interests him happens at a moment-by-moment pace, riding forward on waves of harmonic colour. The triplets that appear so portentous as the movement opens, when cast in different tonal colours, become a daisy-sniffing, walk-in-the-park hummable tune. And the lilting dotted-rhythm motive, so gracious at its first appearance, becomes worrisome when constantly repeated in the minor mode.

Schubert's treatment of his musical material in the following slow movement is much more regular and formally proportioned. The theme for this movement's set of variations is in two parts, each repeated. The first is a direct quotation of the piano introduction to the *Death and the Maiden* lied, with its plodding funeral-march rhythm and mournful repetition of melody notes evoking the sorrow that death brings. The second part maintains the processional rhythm but is more hopeful, ending in the major mode to reflect the lied text's depiction of death as the Great Comforter. Most of the variations decorate the theme with an elegant application of melodic embroidery in the first violin. But the third variation breaks this pattern with its frightening acceleration of the theme's processional rhythm, a pacing that some have compared to the galloping of Death's horse.

The *Allegro molto* scherzo is of a rough Beethovenian stamp, predicated on the play of small, repeated motives, frequent syncopations, and sudden contrasts between *piano* and *forte*. Its Trio middle section is a gently swaying *Ländler* that counts as one of the few moments of sustained lyrical repose in this quartet.

The rondo finale, marked *Presto*, is a kaleidoscope of seemingly contradictory emotional states. Alternating between the driving vehemence of its tarantella refrain in the minor mode and the almost celebratory spirit of its major-mode episodes, this movement is bound together by its boundless energy alone, an energy that seems to transcend major-minor distinctions. Witness its whirlwind coda, that clearly signals an intention to end the work in the major mode, only to switch back to the minor for its last hurrah, yet with no loss of breathless exuberance.

Lotta Wennäkoski
Pige

Composer's remarks:

Something fierce, something soundless, so have I written in my notebook when planning the string quartet **Pige**. It has been an inspiring task to write a work to be paired with the **Death and the Maiden** quartet by Franz Schubert. The "Doppelgänger" idea was greatly feeding my imagination from the very beginning. It's also been an honour to write music for the hugely expressive musicians of the Danish String Quartet.

The first movement **Vorüber, ach, vorüber!** is based on the first half of Schubert's lied that lies behind his **Death and the Maiden** quartet. This "maiden's song" has not found its way to his string quartet, so I wanted to use its material in mine. The second movement **Daktylus** borrows its idea from the haunting pulse of Schubert's chant of Death. Something fierce and something soundless can be heard here – along with other aspects to the dactyl rhythm.

Schubert's quartet is wonderful music and of course an unmissable boulder, and "death and the maiden" is a tempting and gloomy motif in art history. On the other hand, I just couldn't help seeing the motif also as the never-ending image of a dirty old man desiring the young female body... The third movement thus turns its gaze to the girl herself. **Pigen og scrapbogen**, "The Girl and the Scrapbook", is joyful textural music – compiled of fragments and freely handled quotations that might spring to mind when thinking of a vital girl's life.

Pige is Danish for girl. I wish to thank the Danish String Quartet and the co-commissioners for the opportunity to write this music.

Lotta Wennäkoski, March 2022

Franz Schubert
Death and the Maiden

(arr. Danish String Quartet)

Schubert's lied *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (1817) is a setting of a two-stanza poem by German poet Matthias Claudius (1740-1815). Like Schubert's previous lied *Der Erlkönig* (1815), it features an emotionally dramatic, high-stakes conversation about a coming death, but in this lied the Grim Reaper himself takes part in the conversation, in person.

While he is not the first to speak, his presence is strongly intimated in the opening 8-bar slow introduction, whispered out *pianissimo* in the monotonous *TUM tum-tum* rhythm of a funeral march, impassive and virtually devoid of melody, evoking the silence and stillness of the grave. This introduction, which provided the theme for the 3rd movement of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* string quartet, is itself a kind of musical Doppelgänger, echoing another dramatic scene of death foretold – in the same droning monotone, the same key of D minor, and in a virtually identical rhythm – when the Commendatore arrives to escort Don Giovanni down to Hell in the last act of Mozart's opera of 1787.

The voice of the maiden enters in bar 9. She pleads with Death to let her go, as if he were some kind of lecherous elderly suitor making inappropriate advances to her.

In the lied, her melody line rises gradually in pitch to underline her growing sense of concern:

Pass by, oh pass by!
Go, you wild skeleton-man!
I'm still young! Go, then,
And touch me not
And touch me not.

The second stanza gives Death's cunning, seductive and bittersweet reply:

Give me your hand, you lovely tender thing!
I am your friend, I'm not here to make you suffer.
Don't be afraid. I'm not a wild man.
You'll sleep gently in my arms.

The lied ends with the return of the introduction as a postlude in the major mode, its steady unchanging rhythm transformed from a portent of death into a gentle consoling lullaby.

The intertwining of love and death, brought to the stage earlier in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and later in the *Liebstdod* of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, is expressed with elegant simplicity in this short German lied by Schubert.

Donald G. Gíslason 2022

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COVID-19 has changed a great many things about the way in which we move through the world and interact with one another. Over the last couple of years, our supporters have sustained us in ways that we couldn't have imagined, and never have we been more grateful.

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