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SPRING CONCERTS 2024

Danish String Quartet  
Johannes Rostamo cello  
Sunday, April 14 2024

# From the Artistic Director

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Dear Friends:

This is the fourth and final concert in the Danish String Quartet's multi-year *Doppelgänger* project, which pairs Schubert's late quartets with new commissions from composers Bent Sørensen, Lotta Wennäkoski, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, and Thomas Adès. The VRS is delighted to be co-commissioner of this wonderful project.

Today, joined by cellist Johannes Rostamo, they are pairing Schubert's sublime String Quintet with "Wreath for Franz Schubert" by the brilliant British composer, Thomas Adès. This afternoon's performance marks the Canadian premiere of this new work.

Some VRS patrons may remember hearing Thomas Adès when he performed for the VRS at the Chan Centre in 2010. Adès' rare piano recital featured the world premiere of his newly-composed paraphrase on four scenes from his opera 'Powder Her Face', which the VRS, along with three international presenters, was approached to commission. It is a thrill and a privilege for us to continue to be involved in the commissioning of new works.

All those years ago, that Adès commission was made possible by a generous contribution from the Peak Group of Companies. Here we are, fourteen years later, and the Peak Group of Companies is now our Season Sponsor. We couldn't be more grateful.

We would like to thank Elizabeth Arnold-Bailey and Robert Bailey, and Kate Kerr and Paul Cobban for sponsoring this afternoon's performance. Thank you for bringing us this incredible afternoon of music making we shan't soon forget!

Thank you, too, to the City of Vancouver for its support.

Enjoy the performance.

Sincerely,



Leila



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# Program

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## Danish String Quartet

Frederik Øland, violin  
Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen, violin  
Asbjørn Nørgaard, viola  
Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin, cello  
and  
Johannes Rostamo, cello

Sunday, April 14, 2024 3:00 pm  
Vancouver Playhouse

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

### String Quintet in C major D 956

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Scherzo. Presto – Trio. Andante sostenuto

Allegretto

(approx. 55 minutes)

## INTERMISSION

THOMAS ADÈS (b. 1971)

### Wreath for Franz Schubert

(approx. 15-30 minutes)

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

### Die Nebensonnen (from *Die Winterreise*)

Arr. Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen

(approx. 3 minutes)

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# Danish String Quartet

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**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.

**Performances:** This season, the Quartet will complete its DOPPELGÄNGER series, an ambitious four-year international commissioning project that pairs world premieres from four composers – Bent Sørensen, Lotta Wennäkoski, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, and Thomas Adès – with late major chamber works by Schubert. Each season, the Quartet has performed a world premiere on a program with its doppelgänger – the Schubert quartet or quintet that inspired it – culminating in 2024 in the premiere of a quintet by Adès, after the String Quintet in C major. The DOPPELGÄNGER pieces are commissioned by the Danish String Quartet with the support of Carnegie Hall, Cal Performances, UC Santa Barbara Arts & Lectures, the 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.

The Danish String Quartet's most recent recording project is PRISM, a series of five discs on ECM New Series that explores the symbiotic musical and contextual relationships between Bach fugues, Beethoven string quartets and works by Shostakovich, Schnittke, Bartók, Mendelssohn and Webern. The final disc, *PRISM V*, was released to great acclaim in April 2023.

**Awards & Prizes:** 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 has been the recipient of many awards and appointments, including Musical America's 2020 Ensemble of the Year and the Borletti-Buitoni Trust.



Photo credit: Caroline Bittencourt

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

## Johannes Rostamo, cello

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Finnish cellist Johannes Rostamo is a versatile musician interested in all forms of musical communication, from early baroque to contemporary music and from jazz to folk music.

Since 2008, he has served as principal cellist in the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, and since 2022, he has served as a professor of cello at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm.

He also has an active career as a soloist, chamber musician and baroque musician. In addition, Johannes is the artistic leader of the early music ensemble Orfeus Barock Stockholm, with a concert series in Grünewaldsalen, Stockholm.

Johannes enjoys creating projects such as “CelloCelloCello”, a solo project where he presents the timeline of his instrument from the 17th century up until the contemporary music of today, combining both baroque and modern cello. He is also a founding member of the chamber music concept Stockholm Syndrome Ensemble, which experiments with the concert form itself and collaborates with musicians and artists of all genres. Since 2011, this acclaimed group has held concert series in Stockholm, and their albums *Moveable Feast* (Channel Classics) and *Voices of Angels* (BIS) were both received with the highest praise. During the summer season, Johannes is also a recurring guest at several major chamber music festivals throughout Europe.

As an orchestra soloist, he appears regularly with orchestras in the Nordic countries. His solo recording with Orfeus Barock Ensemble playing C.P.E. Bach's A-minor cello concerto received a Swedish Grammy nomination.

As well, a recording of Joonas Kokkonen's Cello Concerto with conductor Paul Mägi and the KMH Symphony Orchestra (live in Tallinn, 2006) has been published by the Academus label.

Apart from his work in Stockholm, Johannes is often invited to work as a guest principal cellist in orchestras such as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Les Siècles (Paris), the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Camera Bern. In addition, he is a regular guest with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Johannes studied music in Helsinki, Stockholm and Oslo and at the ECMA (European Chamber Music Academy) with professors Heikki Rautasalo, Torleif Thedéen, Truls Mørk, Frans Helmerson and Hatto Beyerle. In addition, he has studied baroque cello with Emmanuel Balssa, Bruno Cocset and Gaetano Nasillo.

Johannes plays a cello built by Antonio Stradivari in Cremona in 1698, generously loaned to him by Conni Jonsson. His baroque cello was built by Lockey Hill in London, 1770.



[www.johannesrostamo.com](http://www.johannesrostamo.com)

# Program Notes

## Franz Schubert String Quintet in C major D 956

Schubert's Quintet in C major has been described not only as the composer's "crowning achievement in chamber music" but as "one of the finest chamber works of the nineteenth century."<sup>1</sup>

Schubert's decision to write a string quintet in the last year of his life (1828) with two cellos, instead of the more normal two violas used by Mozart and Beethoven in their quintets, was not entirely unprecedented. Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805), himself a cellist, had done so before but had written the extra cello part relatively high in the range, i.e., as a viola in all but name.

Schubert, by contrast, makes full use of the extra cello's baritone timbre to add a dark but richly burnished lustre to the lower regions of the ensemble and in so doing strides boldly towards a symphonic ideal of sound.

This symphonic ideal is evident in the many passages of throbbing repeated notes that keep the string sonority ringing in your ears while important melodic events are presented. This ideal plays out as well in his varied treatment of instrumental sub-groups as orchestral "choirs" that parallel the established division of orchestral forces into strings, winds, brass and percussion.

That the qualities of pure sound are uppermost in his mind is evident from the way in which the work begins.



Schubert offers us a static representation, without a steady rhythmic pulse, of the structuring harmonies that will undergird his roughly textured first theme.

This theme is eventually announced by the upper strings in a jagged series of chordal leaps, an arrival made to seem all the more disruptive by contrast with the placid opening bars.



1 *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (s.v. "Schubert, Franz") and *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, respectively.

Where the listener is especially grateful for the expansion of musical forces in this quintet is in the glorious second theme, presented in a cello duet with an almost Brahmsian luxuriance of warmth and charm. Its gently swaying melodic line in 3rds and 6ths is exquisitely perfumed with a sentimentality and sophistication that is uniquely Viennese.



The long development section is kept coherent by Schubert's skilful alternation of instrumental groupings that strive in the end towards a great stretto of cross-imitating motives, amid which the return of the opening material in the recapitulation materializes as if by magic.

The slow second movement is serious in tone, a real adagio.



It presents a triptych of contrasting moods, with two otherworldly outer sections bookending a middle section of dramatic - almost melodramatic - intensity of feeling.



This middle section in the minor mode features gasping accompaniment figures fretting anxiously in the off beats between a nervously active bass line and an urgently pleading melody in the first violin. The contrast with the frozen solemnity of the outer sections could not be greater, and the emotional range of this movement as a whole is astonishing.

The third-movement scherzo is also a triptych of contrasting moods, but inversely arranged. Right from the get-go it explodes with a massive wall of sound created by nine-voice chords made still more resonant by the use of open strings (C - G - D).

**SCHERZO.**  
Presto.

The sounds of hunting horns and galloping hooves combine to create a “William-Tell-Overture” type of visceral excitement that contrasts starkly with the subdued, elegiac tone of the middle section trio, with its halting dotted rhythms and descending melodic line.

Many commentators have likened this trio to the Funeral March from Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony No. 3.

The work is rounded out with a dance finale of distinctly Hungarian flavour. It opens in a heavy peasant stomp with thumping off-beat accents. This tune begins in the minor mode but eventually discovers the upside of going major.

**Allegretto.**

More lyrical but still dance-like impulses motivate the lilting second theme announced by a duet between first violin and first cello:





A third thematic element then enters in even quarter notes to calm things down even more and complete the cast of characters in this multi-mood movement.



Despite the emotional buoyancy and “hail-fellow-well-met” tone of the proceedings, Schubert manages to create a surprisingly dark and eyebrow-knitting development section based on the first theme before regaining the merry mood of the opening.

The work concludes with an exhilarating race-to-the-finish accelerando and a final “smudgy” D-flat-to-C crush-note ending, one that Brahms would later appropriate for the final bar of his F minor Quintet scherzo.

## Thomas Adès Wreath for Franz Schubert

Thomas Adès must surely rank as Britain’s most celebrated contemporary composer. His operas have been performed at London’s Royal Opera House and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, while his orchestral, chamber and choral works have been performed by leading ensembles all over Europe and North America.

Thomas Adès sends us this note regarding his new work, which was premiered by the Danish String Quartet with cellist Johannes Rostamo in Copenhagen on March 27, 2024.

*Wreath for Franz Schubert is a single-movement work for string quintet. The central string trio of violin, viola and cello play arco throughout, a gradually unfolding “lifespan” of entwined “blooms”. The outer violin and cello outline them in pizzicato. The players are loosely co-ordinated, but within specific boundaries, so that within certain limits no two performances would be the same, and the duration is flexible: between fifteen and thirty minutes, depending on the players, or maybe the weather.*

*The inescapable relation to Schubert’s double-cello quintet will be clear, especially to its slow movement. At a recent (devastating) performance of it I was fascinated over again by the role of the second cello – at once lead singer, commentator and umpire.*

*I am most grateful to the great Danish String Quartet for giving me the time and encouragement to realize and develop this new path in my work.*

**Franz Schubert**  
**Die Nebensonnen (from *Die Winterreise*)**  
arr. Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen

Schubert's song cycle *Die Winterreise* is remarkable for its vivid musical portraits of the human heart smarting from the pains of love lost and stoically resigned to the approach of death.

In *Die Nebensonnen*, the penultimate song in the cycle, the singer looks up at the sky and sees sundogs, an optical phenomenon caused by the refraction of sunlight through ice crystals that makes bright spots appear in the sky.

Drei Sonnen sah ich am Himmel steh'n  
Hab' lang und fest sie angesehen.  
Und sie auch standen da so stier,  
Als wollten sie nicht weg von mir.

Ach meine Sonnen seid ihr nicht,  
Schaut andern doch in's Angesicht!  
Ja neulich hatt' ich auch wohl drei;  
Nun sind hinab die besten zwei.

Ging' nur die dritt' erst hinterdrein!  
Im Dunkeln wird mir wohler sein.

I saw three suns up in the sky  
I looked at them long and hard  
And there they stood so blankly staring  
As if they would never leave me.

Ah, it's not my suns you are,  
Other faces get your gaze!  
I did of late have three of them  
But now the best ones are down.

Would the third would follow me  
To guide me better in the dark.

This scene puts the singer in mind of the two "suns" that mattered most to him, viz. the eyes of his beloved, now taken from him. Wallowing in self-pity, he notes that the third, the real sun, abandons him too when night falls.

The singer's aching sighs are communicated throughout this lied in the dotted rhythms that are a constant feature of the accompaniment in the opening and closing sections of the song.



The song's saccharine major-mode harmonies dip into the minor mode in the middle section, when the singer thinks of the eyes that now gaze on others, not him.

This arrangement of Schubert's lied for string quartet was created by violinist Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen of the Danish String Quartet.

Program notes by  
Donald G. Gíslason 2024

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