

We are delighted to welcome the ConTempo String Quartet, one of the most celebrated young quartets performing at the present time, to open our 2003-2004 season.

The **ConTempo String Quartet** (Bogdan Sofei, first violin, Ingrid Nicola, second violin, Andreea Banciu, viola and Adrian Mantu, cello) was formed in 1995 at the Music University in Bucharest, Romania.

They have studied with the Amadeus Quartet in Germany, with Rainer Schmidt from the Hagen Quartet, with David Takeno and Tom Rolston at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada, with Piero Farulli in Italy and with the Alban Berg Quartet at the Britten-Pears School for Advanced Music Studies in England. In September 1999 at the invitation of Siegmund Nissel, the quartet took up the Chamber Music Fellowship at the Royal Academy of Music in London, enabling them to develop their skills in tuition and coaching.

The quartet has recently been selected as ensemble-in-residence in Galway, the first full time professional ensemble in the west of Ireland. The group has performed extensively internationally and has won awards in several of the major international string quartet competitions.

The next event in our season:

Friday 31 October 2003 at the Constable Hall East Bergholt
Gemma Rosefield *Cello* & Sophia Rahman *Piano*.
Mendelssohn Variations Concertante **Barber** Sonata
Shostakovich Sonata.

This is a slight change to the previously announced programme, due to the change of pianist.



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STOUR VALLEY ARTS & MUSIC

53rd Season: 2003-2004

ConTempo String Quartet

Sunday 12 October 2003 at 4pm

St. Mary's Church East Bergholt

PROGRAMME

String Quartet in D major **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**
K.V. 575 (1756-1791)

Allegretto ; Andante
Menuetto and Trio (*Allegretto*) ; *Allegretto*

Concerto for String Quartet **Paul Constantinescu**
(1909-1963)

Allegro moderato ; Intermezzo ; Finale (Presto)

INTERVAL

String Quartet in A major, Op. 41 No 3 **Robert Schumann**
(1810-1856)

Andante espressivo
Allegro molto moderato - assai agitato ; Adagio molto
Finale (Allegro molto vivace)

*This concert has been generously supported by an
anonymous sponsor*

PROGRAMME NOTES

In July 1789, **Mozart** wrote to his freemason-friend Michael Puchberg to request a loan of five hundred florins. In the letter, he reports on the progress of his wife's illness, and also on the work he has in hand, namely "six easy pianoforte sonatas for Princess Frederika and six quartets for the King..." The monarch in question was Frederick William II of Prussia, an accomplished cellist. We may surmise that Mozart was hoping that these works might gain him some kind of preferment, because the slightly old-fashioned style of the quartets appears calculated to please musical taste in Berlin – at the time less progressive than that of Vienna. His previous quartets of 1785, dedicated to Haydn, had emulated the older master's textures, with all four instruments sharing equally in the musical discourse. But the 'Prussian' quartets revert to an earlier manner derived from the Parisian *quattor concertant*: thematic material tends to be songlike and elegant, and is shared among the four instruments often by means of solos for each in turn. In all four movements of this afternoon's quartet, the cello is given opportunities to soar above the other players, no doubt a delicate compliment to the work's dedicatee. The major key and broad melodic style make its overall effect relaxed and graceful. At this stage of his career Mozart seems to have been incapable of producing other than a perfect balance between detail and overall structure. The rhythmic and melodic zest of the last movement is particularly pleasing.

Paul **Constantinescu** was one of the leading figures of Romanian music in the twentieth century. He studied at the Bucharest Conservatory (1928–33) and then in Vienna (1934–5). In 1941 he was appointed professor at the School of Military Music and professor of harmony at the Conservatory. He was the first Romanian teacher to introduce a study of the harmony of folk music and of Byzantine chant into his courses, having done original research in both fields (working on the latter with the Byzantine scholar Ion Petrescu). His music draws on a wide range of influences, and exhibits a diversity of approaches, forms and genres. Nevertheless, the style is individual, and served as the foundation for a national school. Whilst Enescu (violinist and composer, 1881-1955: friend and teacher of Menuhin) brought a phase of Romanian music to maturity, Constantinescu pointed the way for a new generation. He was particularly fond of variation procedures, often using them to integrate folksong fragments into his work (effects of humour or irony are sometimes obtained by the reverse of this method, by presenting a folk tune in a deliberately disjointed or caricatured form). Constantinescu also used the rhythm and the *parlando rubato* declamation of peasant music, and his ballets and orchestral pieces are influenced by folk dance. Although his musical language is direct and clear, his works show a high degree of technical mastery. Even so, he was highly self-critical, and revised many works before he was satisfied with them: the Concerto for String Quartet is no exception, having been composed in 1947 and revised in 1955. As the title implies, the writing frequently makes demands on the performers of a soloistic nature.

Until he was past thirty, **Schumann** was probably better known as a critic than as a composer, though the situation began to change with the publication of the First Symphony and the Piano Quintet. In 1842, whilst his wife Clara was on tour giving piano recitals, he put himself through exercises in counterpoint and fugue writing, and also began studying the quartets of Mozart and Haydn. Soon he was working on the String Quartets in A minor and F (op.41 nos.1 and 2), which were sketched and elaborated as a pair in June and early July. This afternoon's quartet was composed later in July – in just two weeks. As a critic, Schumann made two principal demands of the prospective composer of string quartets. First, the 'proper' quartet style should avoid 'symphonic furore' and aim rather for a conversational tone in which 'everyone has something to say'. Secondly, the composer must possess an intimate knowledge of the genre's history, but should strive to produce more than mere imitations of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Both aspects of this aesthetic are aptly reflected in Schumann's own quartets, which he proudly described in a letter to Härtel of December 1847 as the best works of his earlier period.

A short slow introduction launches the third quartet. It begins with a motif of a falling fifth, whose yearning quality proclaims at once the work's Romantic nature. The motif proves to be fundamental in the following Allegro, and indeed in the other movements. Both first and second subjects of the first movement are endearingly lyrical. The second movement, in the relative minor key, is a most original design. It appears at first to be an agitated, uneasy scherzo (whose motivic focus - a rising fourth - is the inversion of the quartet's initial falling fifth). Only gradually does it reveal that it is more like a series of variations. The opening sections, which include a fugato, are elaborations of the songful theme whose basic form only emerges half-way through, in the tempo of a slow *Sicilienne*. The concluding part of the movement, Tempo risoluto, makes no attempt to close or balance the form, but instead is stern and forceful. At the quartet's heart is a fervent, hymn-like slow movement: a warmly melodic sonata design with two deeply expressive themes that are briefly developed and reprised. Clearly influenced by some of Beethoven's slow movements, this movement is another evoking dark shadows which are not entirely dispelled until the last movement, which begins with a vivacious and rhythmically assertive theme. It is a highly inventive combination of sonata-rondo and scherzo, including a gavotte-like episode which Schumann marks "Quasi Trio". This movement displays perhaps the most adventurous use of quartet textures and tonal effects, though despite the composer's declared intentions, the music relates closely to the parallel aspirations of Schumann the symphonist. The extensive coda only reinforces this impression, but if the final bars are indeed "orchestral" in effect, they none-the-less bring Schumann's only quartet cycle to an ebullient and impressive end.