

About the Artists

The New Zealand Chamber Soloists was formed in 2006 by core members **Katherine Austin (piano), Lara Hall (violin), and James Tennant (cello).**

As one of New Zealand's premier chamber music ensembles The New Zealand Chamber Soloists perform regularly within New Zealand and abroad whilst retaining a close association with the Conservatorium of Music at the University of Waikato. Primarily exponents of piano trio repertoire, they collaborate with composers and performers to produce vibrant and electrifying festival and concert performances, juxtaposing the old and new worlds that meet in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Their debut album, "Elegy" reached No. 1 on the NZ classical charts for a total of six weeks and was the flagship recording for Atoll Records' international release programme of its 100-album catalogue of New Zealand work.

For this concert they are joined by violinist Dimitri Atanassov, Concert Master of the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra 2004-2013, and founding member of the Ogen Trio with Katherine Austin and James Tennant.

Dimitri Atanassov was born in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1970 and started learning the violin at the age of 6. After studying with Professor Anna Ivanova, Dimitri studied at the Prague Academy of Arts under the guidance of Professor Vaclav Smitil where he excelled as a musician, completing his Master's degree in 1994. As a chamber musician and also in his former role as Concertmaster of the Auckland Philharmonia orchestra, he has worked and performed with many leading international artists.

Inspired by the works of the old Cremonese masters Guarneri and Stradivari, Dimitri took up violin making in 2002. He also learned violin making and restoration in the USA, France and Italy. His instruments have become popular for their superb quality of sound and playability. In 2013 he opened his workshop in Cremona, Italy, situated on Corso Garibaldi, about 200m away from Casa nuziale di Stradivari.

About Composer Jenny McLeod

Jenny McLeod was born in 1941 in Wellington, New Zealand, and studied in the 1960s with Douglas Lilburn at Victoria University of Wellington, then in Paris with Messiaen and in Cologne with Stockhausen. An early avant-garde chamber work, *For Seven*, had some success over the years in Europe, Britain, the United States and New Zealand. Formerly Professor of Music at Victoria University, Jenny McLeod has composed piano, vocal, choral, chamber and orchestral works, film, and television scores, as well as three large music-theatre 'spectaculars' for schools and amateurs—*Earth and Sky* (1968), *Under the Sun* (1970), and the Wellington *Sun Festival* (1983)—an 'outdoor harbour extravaganza'. McLeod has had a long association with the New Zealand Maori people (a number of her texts are wholly or partly in Maori) and was a pioneer mover in the nation's burgeoning biculturalism. She is also known for her work with the 'tone clock' theory, a chromatic harmonic theory formulated by the Dutch composer Peter Schat (1935–2003) whom she first met in Kentucky in 1987. Her more recent output includes three song cycles to poems by iconic New Zealand writer the late Janet Frame, one of which (*The Poet*, for chamber choir and string quartet) was chosen to represent New Zealand at the 2009 International Rostrum of Composers in Paris. In the 1996 Queen's Birthday honours she was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit, and in 2008 received the CANZ (Composers' Association of New Zealand) KBB Citation, for services to New Zealand music.

Dark Bright Night was commissioned for the New Zealand Chamber Soloists as part of their 7 x 7 project by Ian Graham and Agi Lehár-Graham to celebrate the birth of their granddaughter Clara.

Jenny McLeod Dark Bright Night

here in the wee small hours
the tone clock's tempered
geometries play

enchancing as hidden
rainbow darkneses

no more sea, no rocks
no ebb and flow, not imaginary birds
but the third hour subscale
familiar as earth and sky
and the adorable
second hour all shape shifting
airily, merrily
minor to major and back,
this fresher warming
beguiling as the *tūturu*

shadows, flashes, shocks
sudden, shuddering tremolo
background foreground (which?
or who?) and contrary
motion (unity). . .what?

'aliens talking to angels'?
(the lady lies in her pool
in the dark, eavesdropping)

sharp-edged, punchy, headlong
crunchy, quirky, perky
get a grip
echoes of childhood
going on eighty

this is
the way the world ends?
(or the programme maybe) . . .

not with a whimper, anyway

JOHANNES BRAHMS 1833-1897
Piano Quartet in C Minor Op.60
Allegro ma non troppo
Scherzo
Andante
Finale: Allegro

In 1855 the young 22-year-old Johannes Brahms was living in the household of Robert and Clara Schumann and found himself in the role of 'man of the house' when Robert, who had musically 'discovered' and mentored him, put himself into a sanatorium after a failed suicide attempt. In the house he was in close contact with Clara, who had just given birth to her seventh child and was continuing to maintain her very successful concert career. Brahms was smitten with Clara and this was reciprocated in words that Clara wrote at that time, "It is not his youth that attracts me....no it's his fresh mind, the glorious, gifted nature, the noble heart that I love him for." During these intense months it became clear that she had decided to resist Brahms romantic desires which caused him great anguish and saw him move out of the house.

In April of 1856, still hurting from the rejection, Brahms started writing a piano quartet in c minor, completing a three-movement version. This version was put away for many years until Brahms retrieved the score and commenced rewriting the work in the 1870's. Correspondence of the time with his publisher revealed that he was still suffering from his emotional experiences of the 1850's, relating that his feelings regarding the piano quartet were closely related to Goethe's work entitled 'Sorrows of Young Werther', which tells the tale of man who commits suicide because of his love for the wife of a friend.

In the final published version, the original first and final movements were maintained, and new third and fourth movements added. Around the time Brahms was rewriting the piano quartet he was composing many works in c minor including his first symphony and first string quartet, and re-wrote the piano quartet also in the key of c minor.

The c minor quartet begins with a forte c in both hands of the piano, immediately invoking tragedy and despair, to which the strings respond with a descending semitone motif that seems to some to be representative of the name Clara.

Then comes a five note 'Clara theme' used in many of Schumann's works. After these introductions, the strings set us off into an emotional aggressive set of variations which ends as if one is totally exhausted and at one's wits end.

The second movement's thematic material continues to find new versions of despair and anger. This movement, curiously, does not have an expected trio of a scherzo movement, supporting the idea it was the last movement of the original piano quartet.

The Andante begins with one of Brahms's most beautiful cello melodies. It has been suggested that this movement and the start of the fourth were in fact ideas for solo sonatas for the cello and violin. Be that as it may, the melodic beauty and intertwining of material throws off the feeling of despair that dominates the previous movements.

The Finale starts with a long violin solo suggestive of melancholy and regret, moods which are pervasive in this movement. A positive heroic chorale is heard in the piano towards the end of the movement to which the strings add descending diminished intervals, somewhat dampening this hope. A gradual diminishing of energy and hope is followed with two gunshot like chords to finish off one of the darkest of Brahms's creations.

About 7 x 7

7x7 is a large commissioning project – seven New Zealand female will to each compose a seven-minute piano trio. The composers who are being commissioned (subject to contractual agreement) are Jenny McLeod, Helen Bowater, Janet Jennings, Claire Cowan, Salina Fisher, Gillian Whitehead, and Eve de Castro-Robinson. This body of work will be built up over three years and then be prepared as a commercial recording. Over time, the works will also be toured throughout New Zealand as well as internationally to showcase New Zealand composers.

The works will be individually premiered as part of the New Zealand Chamber Soloists' Auckland Concert Series, at the Auckland Town Hall, Concert Chamber. Presenting a regular concert series in Auckland is a welcome addition to the New Zealand Chamber Soloist's performance calendar, alongside the ensemble's other work – performing regularly in Hamilton, in regional centres throughout the Waikato and other engagements throughout New Zealand and overseas.

Rebecca Clarke Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano

Moderato, ma appassionato

Andante, molto semplice

Allegro vigoroso

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) was one of the most individual and enterprising British composers of either sex. Born in Harrow, England of a German mother and an American father, she helped to create an international perspective that transcended her traditional musical study at the Royal College of Music with Vaughan Williams and Holst. She was also one of the most celebrated violists of her time, performing under Henry Wood in the Queen's Hall Orchestra as well as an excellent chamber musician partnering such renown names as Rubenstein, Casals, Heifetz and Segeti. Such high-level chamber music playing served her well as with such an intimate understanding of the writing for strings and piano through rehearsing and performing this profound repertoire, she could observe first-hand what constitutes a strong, appealing and moving composition. And even though Rebecca would write a large body of songs, it is within the chamber music genre that she truly found her strongest expression.

In 1918, Clarke started writing her first major work, her viola sonata, which was joint first prize winner alongside Ernst Bloch's Viola Suite in the 1919 Coolidge Competition in the USA. Because of the times, her sonata was entered under a male pseudonym, which made the unveiling of her real name a minor sensation and notoriety, which lead immediately to the publishing of the work. This began the most intensive and productive period of composing that lead to her writing what is widely acknowledged to be her masterpiece, the Piano Trio #1. This expressive and emotionally complex work has been recognized as one of the most outstanding compositions written during this period by any British composer. Perhaps being a reaction to the great war, the first movement opens with a violent fanfare-like motive that recurs throughout the three movements. From the opening, this motive becomes almost a distant bugle-call. With the second movement's more lyrical bend, there is still a troubling undercurrent which lead us to the final movement and its robust, dance-like music that flings us forward towards a climax that is in turn, a tragic processional, that brings us to an exhaustive, thoughtful ending.