

ARTISTS

Elizabeth Sellars, violin

Wilma Smith, violin

Helen Ireland, viola

Zoe Knighton, cello

Michael Houstoun, piano

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet No.11 in F minor, Op.95, "Serioso" (composed 1810)

I. Allegro con brio

II. Allegretto ma non troppo

III. Allegro assai vivace ma serioso

IV. Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato – Allegro

This work was written without a commission, and if Beethoven had his wish, we probably wouldn't be playing it today. The note accompanying the manuscript read: "The Quartet is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public." Dedicated to his dear friend, Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovecz, the work seems to have been Beethoven's own personal experiment; and what a riveting experiment it is.

It's one of his shortest quartets, but don't be fooled, it packs a punch. Beethoven himself gave it the nickname "Serioso," most probably in reference to the third movement, but you can feel that serious intent right from the opening bars. The first movement is tense, compact, almost impatient in its fury. And just between us: the tempo marking for the first movement has caused more than one quartet to raise an eyebrow (and possibly a metronome in protest). It's ridiculously fast.

The second movement (serving as a slow movement but, curiously, marked Allegretto) begins with a simple but purposeful descending scale which blossoms into a long melodious line and then embarks on an extended fugato, leaving us suspended before bursting into the third movement.

The opening eight bars of the last movement give us a glimpse of a slow movement, but eight bars is all that's allowed. After this, nervousness and unrest ensue in agitated writing. The twist of the major key comes completely unexpectedly and as the American composer Randall Thompson puts it: "no bottle of champagne was ever uncorked at a better time."

DEBORAH CHEETHAM FRAILLON (1964-)

"Bungaree" (composed 2020) NZ premiere

Commissioned by Flinders Quartet with support from Andrew Dixon, in memory of Jean and John Dixon

I. November 24

II. Kaaroo

III. Navigating the Truth

Flinders Quartet is named after Flinders Street Station: the iconic Melbourne landmark, but therefore, inadvertently also named after Matthew Flinders. When we asked Deborah Cheetham Fraillon to write us a new string quartet she immediately found that new research had come to light about Bungaree (or Boongaree), a Kuringgai man who was vital in helping Matthew Flinders circumnavigate the Australian continent on the Investigator. Flinders remarked that he was impressed with Bungaree's friendly demeanour, bravery and intuition; and apparently, Bungaree seemed to have had quite an affection for Flinders' cat, Trim. There is a statue of Trim in Australia, but no statue of Bungaree. This is a musical monument of a man whose story deserves to be remembered.

In 1815, Governor Lachlan Macquarie dubbed Bungaree "Chief of the Broken Bay Tribe" and presented him with 15 acres of land on George's Head in Sydney. He was also known by the titles "King of Port Jackson" and "King of the Blacks", with his principal wife, Kaaroo (named Cora Gooseberry by the British) known as his queen.

Bungaree continued his exploratory voyages with Captain Phillip Parker King to north-western Australia in 1817 on the Mermaid; and Captain Faddei Bellingshausen made reference to Bungaree's welcoming visit to the Russian exploration ship Vostok in 1820. Bungaree died in November 1830 and is buried in Rose Bay. By the end of his life, he had become a familiar sight in Colonial Sydney, often dressed in uniforms that had been given to him for his service. He had a gift for humour and mimicry (particularly of past and present governors) and was a popular subject for portrait painters, with no less than 18 portraits. His were among the first full-length oil portraits to be painted in the colony and the first to be published as a lithograph.

The first movement of Cheetham Fraillon's "Bungaree" begins with a musical depiction of his name in the cello. This is particularly pertinent as his name would not have been said out loud after his death. There's a stillness which gives way to shimmering arpeggiated figures under a melody with strength and assuredness. A little four note figure which is a ray of hope is used as a unifying motif through the three movements. The second movement is entitled "Kaaroo", and represents his wife's beauty and strength of character. The third movement is entitled "Navigating the Truth" as we look towards the future.

"Bungaree" has been recorded by Flinders Quartet for ABC Classics and is available on Women of Note, Vol. 5.

interval

ANTONIN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Piano Quintet No. 2 in A major Op. 81 (composed 1887)

I. Allegro ma non tanto

II. Dumka. Andante con moto

III. Scherzo-Furiant: Molto vivace

IV. Finale. Allegro

Who could believe that an apprentice butcher from a Bohemian village near Prague would grow up to deliver some of the most loved music of the 19th century? Perhaps it is his humble upbringing that delivers music innately relatable to people of all backgrounds; Dvořák's music effortlessly straddles that line between highbrow and down-to-earth.

Written in between his seventh and eighth symphonies, Dvořák was at the height of his compositional prowess when he wrote his second piano quintet in A major. It all began when he went back to improve an earlier composition (his Op. 5 quintet, also in A major) but decided against overhauling an old work in favour of writing an entirely new composition. Sometimes it is just simpler to start again.

Dvořák primarily wrote this work at his summer residence, Vysoká, which explains the optimism and sheer joy radiating from the score. The opening theme in the cello sends vibes of comfort and ease throughout the group, and when Tchaikovsky heard the composition at a soirée a matter of months after the ink was dry, he remarked, "*They played quartets by Smetana and Kovařovic, and the quintet by Dvořák. I found the latter very amiable and I very much liked his quintet.*"

(We have never heard of Kovařovic, but surely his music deserves investigation having been played in such stellar company!)

The second movement is one of Dvořák's trademark Dumkas, a lament that apparently has to be followed by a dance or its melancholy will never truly be felt. Following that, the third movement Furiant, a slavic dance used often by Dvořák, and a toe-tapping Allegro turning this quintet into one of the most loved in history.

Fun fact: the original manuscript was discovered in Italy in 2015. Dvořák had given it to his Italian student, Leone Sinigaglia, who sold to an anonymous buyer for 50,000 euros.

FLINDERS QUARTET

For over 25 years, Flinders Quartet (FQ) has been a leader in Australian chamber music, commissioning over 75 new works, reaching #1 on the ARIA Core Classical chart, touring four continents, mentoring more than 100 ensembles, and earning a reputation as a vanguard of artistic integrity.

"A transcendent performance..." — Alan Holley, classikON, 2024

FQ is known for bringing a 21st-century lens to the string quartet canon through bold interdisciplinary collaborations. Highlights include *Behind Closed Doors* with Red Stitch Actors' Theatre; *Shostakovich* with Richard Piper; *Puck's Dream* with Iain Grandage and Chris Moore;

Bartók My Father with Piper; and *The Mendelssohns* with Piper and Bryony Mark, each project expanding the quartet's reach to new and diverse audiences.

"A unique, unforgettable experience." — Kieran Welch, *Limelight*, 2024

The nurturing of Australian composers and the development of high quality string quartets is central to FQ's work. Its *Ascend* and *Emerge* composer programs have supported over 50 Australian composers, including Anne Cawrse, Ella Macens, and Matthew Laing. In 2025, FQ partners with the Hush Foundation to create string quartets for healing, to be used in clinical environments.

FQ's belief in the transformative power of chamber music underpins its work with Resonance String Orchestra and the John Noble Itet program, offering mentoring and professional development in regional communities.

Access is core to FQ's values, with open rehearsals, free concerts, and public-school collaborations that use the string quartet to inspire students across music, media, dance, and the visual arts.

flindersquartet.com

MICHAEL HOUSTOUN

Michael Houstoun was born in Timaru, New Zealand in October 1952. He began piano lessons at the age of five and under the guidance of Sr Mary Eulalie and subsequently Maurice Till he moved through the grades of the Trinity College of London examination system (ATCL 96%, LTCL 97%). At the same time he won all the major piano competitions in NZ and began playing with orchestras.

In 1973 at the age of twenty he entered and placed third in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. This led to a year of study with Rudolf Serkin at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

In 1975 he placed fourth in the Leeds International Piano Competition and then in 1982 sixth in the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition.

After living overseas for six years - including a valuable period of study with Brigitte Wild in London - he returned home in 1981 where he has enjoyed his life as something of an 'Artist in Residence', performing recitals, concertos and chamber music all over the country year in year out.

Most years he performs one or two new programs and consequently has built a very large repertoire spanning from J S Bach to the present day. Included are many compositions by NZ composers and quite a few commissions.

Houstoun has twice presented the complete Beethoven sonatas in seven-concert cycles. More recently he has performed the 48 Preludes and Fugues of Bach's 'Well-tempered Klavier' in two-concert events.

Since 1999 he has recorded for Rattle Records (rattle.co.nz) with five of his albums winning Classical Record of the Year awards.

He has honorary degrees from Massey and Victoria universities, is a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit and a Laureate of the Arts Foundation of New Zealand.

michaelhoustoun.co.nz