

New Zealand String Quartet

Helene Pohl, violin · Douglas Beilman, violin · Gillian Ansell, viola · Rolf Gjelsten, cello

Program 1 - All-Beethoven program

Beethoven String Quartet in B flat major Opus 18 No 6

Beethoven String Quartet in F minor Opus 95

Beethoven String Quartet No 14 in C# minor Opus 131

Program 2

Beethoven String Quartet in B flat major Opus 18 No 6

Shostakovich String Quartet No 11

Shostakovich String Quartet No 7

Beethoven String Quartet in F minor Opus 95

Program 3

Haydn String Quartet in D Major opus 64 No 5, "The Lark"

Shostakovich String Quartet No 9

Gillian Whitehead (b. 1941) Hineputehue (with Richard Nunns, Maori instruments)*

or

Michael Norris Exitus for string quartet*

Beethoven String Quartet No 14 in C# minor Opus 131

Repertoire Comments:

Michael Norris Exitus for string quartet (2009)

The human brain is capable of remarkable feats of understanding and analysis, yet has trouble conceiving of its own death. Death is our blind spot — we are forced to make up stories about what we will experience after our passing. Human culture, therefore, overflows with afterworld narratives, and in some cases these have become rich in specific details, textures and landscapes. Afterworlds may be light, dark, watery, icy, misty, subterranean, found in the clouds, in the earth, in the sun, in the moon. They may be places of peace and redemption, or places of violence and damnation. In *Exitus*, I chose four specific afterworlds as starting points in the musical development of distinct sonic images.

I. QUIDLIVUN [“The Land of the Moon”]

In Inuit mythology, spirits who maintained a virtuous life are taken to Quidlivun, the Land of the Moon, where they find eternal rest.

II. XIBALBÁ [“The Place of Fear”]

Xibalbá is the name of the Mayan underworld. Souls who walked the road to the subterranean Xibalbá are faced by tribulations such as rivers of blood and pus, and once in Xibalbá, are faced with deadly trials by darkness, cold, fire, razor blades, hungry jaguars, and shrieking bats.

III. NIFLHEIM [“The House of Mists”]

In Norse mythology, Niflheim is a far northern region of icy fogs and mists, darkness and cold. It is situated on the lowest level of the universe, underneath the third root of Yggdrasil, the world tree. An old Norse hymn tune “Med Jesus vil eg fara” (With Jesus I will journey) is played almost inaudibly by violins and viola, above which the cello traces thin, delicate keening.

IV. OKA LUSA HACHA [“Black Water River”]

In the afterworld myths of the Choctaw tribe of Native Americans, the soul heads down a long road to the East in search of the good hunting grounds, and faces a trial by crossing a log over the Black Water River. If he has sinned, he falls into the great gushing waterfall beneath.

Michael Norris (b. 1973, Dunedin) is a Wellington-based composer. He holds composition degrees from Victoria University of Wellington and City University, London, and is currently Programme Leader (Composition) at the New Zealand School of Music. In 2003, Michael won the Douglas Lilburn Prize, a nationwide competition for orchestral composers. He is also co-founder and co-director of Stroma New Music Ensemble, and has participated in composition courses featuring leading composers such as Peter Eötvös, Alvin Lucier, Christian Wolff and Kaija Saariaho. Recent projects include Heavy Traffic, commissioned by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, featuring contrabassoonist Hamish McKeich, tesserae...interstices for members of the Luxembourg Philharmonic, and Blindsight, commissioned by the Pierrot Lunaire Ensemble Wien. He is currently working on a commission from the Radio Chamber Orchestra Hilversum for performance at the Donaueschinger Musiktage 2010.

Hineputehue Gillian Whitehead (b. 1941)

Hineputehue translates literally as “the woman of the sound of the gourd”, and she is the Maori goddess of peace. The work was written in 2001, at the time of President Bush’s State of the Union address shortly before the invasion of Afghanistan, and suggests the

fragility rather than the celebration of peace, particularly in a pre-European environment.

A number of instruments used in Hineputehue are made of gourds – the gourd, which carried food and water, is a symbol of peace. These include the poi awiowhio, a very quiet bird lure which is swung around the head, the tiny koauau ponga ihu or nose flute which ends the piece, the hue puru hau, a large gourd which is blown across its top opening and the gourd rattles played by the quartet. Two other wind instruments frequently made from gourds, the nguru and the ororuarangi, are also used. Other instruments are the putatara or conch shell trumpet, traditionally used for signaling, the pu kaea or war trumpet, a nguru niho paroa or flute made from a whale's tooth, the pumotomoto, associated with birth, and tumutumu (tapped percussion).

There is a similarity between the stringed instruments of the quartet and the gourds, in that they are made from plant material, with sound emitted through sound holes. Another link is the ku, the only stringed instrument known to Maori, which is a small musical bow played like a jaws harp (jews harp) using the mouth as a resonating chamber. The idea of ororuarangi, which can be translated as spirit voice (or double stopping in a different context) has had some influence on this piece as in the parallel movement of the strings. Commissioned by the NZ International Festival 2002 for the New Zealand String Quartet and Richard Nunns

Dame Gillian Karawe Whitehead (b. 1941)

Dame Gillian Whitehead was born in Hamilton, New Zealand in 1941. She graduated BMus Hons in New Zealand in 1964, and then studied composition at the University of Sydney with Peter Sculthorpe, graduating MMus in 1966. That same year she attended a composition course given by Peter Maxwell Davies in Adelaide and in 1967 travelled to England to continue studying with him. She worked in London for two years and then worked in Portugal and Italy from 1969-70. For the next seven years she continued freelance composing, principally based in the UK. From 1978-80 she was Composer in Residence for Northern Arts attached to Newcastle University (UK). In 1981 she joined the staff of the Composition School at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music where she was Head of Composition from 1992 -1996. She now divides her time as a free-lance composer between Sydney and Dunedin, New Zealand.

In 2000 she became one of the inaugural Artist Laureates of the NZ Arts Foundation and she has three times won the prestigious SOUNZ Contemporary Award for her compositions. In 2005/6 she was the inaugural Composer-in-residence at the New Zealand School of Music. In 2008 she became a Distinguished Companion of the New

Zealand Order of Merit, one of New Zealand's highest honours, and she was granted the title 'Dame' in 2009.