

Aroha String Quartet Newsletter



April 2020

***Flight* concerts cancelled**

What strange and difficult times we live in! We hope you have been keeping safe and well in your bubbles over the last few weeks. Our thoughts go out to all the people connected to those who have died from Covid-19, to those who are ill, and to those who are struggling with the many other impacts of the pandemic.

We managed to play one concert (at the Hamilton Gardens Arts Festival - see below) before cancelling all our remaining concerts for the first half of 2020. We'd been rehearsing our *Flight* programme for performance in half a dozen centres. We will now perform this programme in the first half of 2021. We are planning to present our *Phantasy* concerts in the second half of this year as scheduled, coronavirus permitting!

Meanwhile, we have been busy at home teaching via Zoom or Skype, practising, and getting involved in online musical collaborations. You can see some of these on the NZSO or RNZ Concert websites as part of the *Play Our Part* and *Discovering Beethoven* live streaming.

You can find recordings from some of our previous seasons on our [YouTube channel](#). We'll post up our new Quartet online collaborations soon...

***Phantasy* programme**

We are planning to go ahead with our concerts for August to November, assuming that the country will have reached an alert level that allows public events like this to go ahead.

In our *Phantasy* programme we are joined by Robert Orr, NZSO Principal Oboe, for two British works by for oboe and strings: Britten's [Phantasy Quartet Op 2](#), the first piece that brought him international recognition, and Bliss's gorgeous [Oboe Quintet](#). In that programme we also celebrate the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth with his first 'Rasumovsky' quartet, the [String Quartet No 7 in F Op 59 No 1](#). The fourth work in this programme is '[refrain](#)' by award-winning New Zealand composer Alex Taylor.



We're currently scheduled to play the *Phantasy* programme in the following centres:

- Dunedin, 30 August
- Oamaru, 31 August
- Christchurch (for Christopher's Classics), 3 September
- Lower Hutt (for Chamber Music Hutt Valley), 8 September
- Palmerston North, 9 September
- Napier, 10 September
- Auckland, 13 September
- Motueka (for Motueka Music Group), 15 October
- Arrowtown (for Arrowtown Spring Festival), 18 October
- Wellington, 1 November
- Kerikeri (for Aroha Music Society), 22 November

We hope to see you at one of these shows!

ASQ International Academy 2020 - still alive!

In this weird time it's very hard to plan ahead, not knowing what kinds of activities will be possible in the future. We contemplated cancelling our 2020



ASQ International Music Academy, the sixth we've run. However, already more than a dozen people have registered, some loyal regulars, some newcomers. We realised that if the Covid-19 alert level allows it, then the chance to make music together might be just the thing we'll need after a long period of isolation.

Some arrangements will need to remain flexible, but for now we can confirm:

- the 2020 Academy will take place if the Government's public health directives allow it and at least 20 people register
- the dates will be the same as those already advertised: 13-18 July
- the Academy will be in the wonderful facilities of Chilton St James School in Lower Hutt
- the Academy will still focus on student and adult non-professional string players and pianists of a minimum standard of Grade VI
- we'll still take \$100 as a deposit from applicants, but refund it if the Academy doesn't take place
- applications will now close on **Friday 26 June**
- the total fee will be lower - \$300 for a short course (first or second half) and \$600 for the full six-day course, payable on the same date as the application deadline

- applicants should use the existing application form

Some other changes are described on our [website](#). Here you'll also find the Academy brochure and application form.

You'll find videos of string orchestra performances from the 2017, 2018 and 2019 Academies on the [ASQ Academy YouTube channel](#). Click on the links to hear '[Yao Dance](#)' and other works from the 2016 Academy by [Anthony Ritchie](#) and [Grieg](#). There's also a performance of the wonderful piano trio [Subtle Dances](#) by Claire Cowan.

Mondo Rondo at the Hamilton Gardens Arts Festival

We played this very special concert on 26 February, part of the Hamilton Garden Arts Festival.

The show took place on what must have been one of the hottest days of the year. We did a brief soundcheck in our final playing position before retreating from the intense sun and 38 degree heat to the relative cool of the upstairs balcony to finish our rehearsal.



Bathed in light from a golden sunset, the audience sat in the colourful surroundings of the Medici Court, listening to a cross-cultural programme that brought together popular Chinese folk songs and well-known NZ compositions, with occasional video accompaniment by Ed Davis.

The concert opened robustly with *Dance of the Sidhe* by Sam Piper, followed by eight picturesque [Chinese folk songs](#) arranged by Zhou Long, and Anthony

Ritchie's atmospheric *Whakatipua*. A darker tone was struck by an arrangement of the famous revolutionary China ballet *White Haired Girl*. We concluded with the work after which the concert was named: Gareth Farr's *Mondo Rondo*.

Birdsong and crickets added to the fresh, lighthearted and uplifting atmosphere of the venue.

We were delighted to have Bronwyn Bent, the Artistic Director of the festival join us as MC. It was a real thrill to perform for an enthusiastic audience in such a wonderful setting. Our last show before lockdown!

ASQ International Music Academy in Asia 2020

From 13-18 January, the third ASQ International Music Academy in Asia welcomed 67 passionate young musicians from China, NZ, Macau and Hong Kong. Over the busy six day programme, they enjoyed rehearsing and performing more than 20 chamber ensemble and string orchestra works.

Highlights included Pachelbel's Canon, Gypsy Medley, Albinoni's Adagio, Rossini's *Semiramide* overture and the Polar Express Suite, in which guest percussionists from a local school joined the Academy for the first time. There were plenty of exciting moments!



The programme also included individual lessons and a variety of lunchtime activities, among them two instrumental lectures featuring viola and double bass. These were full of fun facts and much enjoyed by the students!

This Academy included for the first time a lunchtime chamber music contest, with all groups winning prizes for excellent improvement or excellent teamwork. It has been a real pleasure to see the growing co-operation and developing skills amongst both students and the teaching faculty.

2019 *Unbound* concerts

In the second half of 2019 we were very fortunate to be able to play the Brahms Piano Quintet with Diedre Irons. Her beautiful musicianship inspired us a lot and we enjoyed all our eight performances immensely. The season was very drawn out, from the end of June till the beginning of December. But that gave us time to grow into our pieces more and more.

Our first concert took place in Greytown, in the huge living room of the Cooke family which was full to the last seat. We felt very welcome and even were invited for dinner afterwards!

The Waikanae Music Society owns a beautiful grand piano which made up for the plain atmosphere of the sports hall. Luckily the acoustics are quite nice there though.

The reviews for our *Unbound* tour were pretty positive. The reviewer for our Napier concert, Louis Pierard, commented:

"The main work ... was Brahms' magnificent, muscular Piano Quintet in F minor with the incomparable Deidre Irons. And it fulfilled every expectation. Such magnificent power! Right from the tempestuous opening, Irons put her masterly stamp on the work. The five played with enormous energy, consummate delicacy, with an intuitive collaboration and infectious passion that captured both the quintet's fire and its tragic beauty. It brought a tear to the eye. The monastic austerity of the venue's pews all but forgotten, chamber music performances don't come much better than this."

We did a two day trip to the South Island and performed in Oamaru and Dunedin. Oamaru was a very special experience: we got to stay in a beautiful hotel with amazing antique decorations and played a concert in front of what felt like the entire population of the town! The church was packed with curious, enthusiastic people. Diedre got to perform on a 100-year old Bechstein piano that had left its home for the first time since having been brought over from Europe.

In Dunedin we played in Marama Hall at the University of Otago for the first time and immediately fell in love with its beautiful acoustics and feel. We are hoping to be able to perform there again this year, Coronavirus permitting!



We had unknowingly planned our concert in Auckland on the day of the Christmas parade and feared that this would be detrimental for audience numbers. But luckily that wasn't the case. Phew! St Matthews-in-the-City is a lovely, unique venue and we were very happy that Brigid Bisley, the composer of the title piece for the programme was able to be there.

In Palmerston North we performed for the first time in the larger of the two halls of the Globe Theatre. We are looking forward to be able to return to lovely St Andrews at the end of the year, once renovations are finished.

It was nice to finish our season in St Andrew's on The Terrace in Wellington in front of friends and family before having a summer break.

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Mailing list

Our e-mail list is a great way to let our supporters know what the Quartet is up to. Maybe you have family, friends or workmates who would also enjoy hearing from us.

If you know someone who would like to be on the Aroha Quartet mailing list to receive occasional newsletters and concert notices, please either send us their name, location and e-mail address or ask them to sign up on our [website](#) (link on the top left of the home page).



Photo: Wenhao Li

With our best wishes,

Haihong, Konstanze, Zhongxian & Robert
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