

# ECHO Rising Stars: Sonoro Quartet

**Start time:** 6.30pm

**Approximate end time:** 7.45pm, with no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

## Programme

**Seán Doherty** String Quartet No 3, *The Devil's Dream*

**Guillaume Lekeu** *Molto adagio sempre cantante doloroso*

**Annelies Van Parys** *Tsunami* (commissioned by ECHO)

**Dmitri Shostakovich** String Quartet No 8

1. Largo
2. Allegro molto
3. Allegretto
4. Largo
5. Largo

**Wrapped up in the string quartet repertoire is, among other things, a great complexity of feeling: the four players representative of so many of a composer's innermost thoughts and challenges.**

They can function as a family, as competitors, as stand-ins for characters in an intricate emotional game. The four speak to their audience about death, about politics, about loss and love and nature, communicating deeply with just the lift of an eyebrow, the incline of the head. The devil – whom we will come to know a little later on – is in the details, much of the repertoire written for this particular collection of instruments insisting upon an inquisitive and ruthless eye for exactitude. The players need to be actors and translators, allowing long dead composers to waltz with living ones, animating the dots on the page so they take wing.

Today's programme, built on stories intimate and expansive, begins with the aforementioned devil in the String Quartet No 3, *The Devil's Dream*, by Seán Doherty (born 1987). The piece, which finds its roots in the fiddle tradition of Donegal in northwest Ireland, is born from the edges of that folk music: 'aggressive, driving and un-ornamented'. Doherty imagines the tunes of that tradition as 'stark as the bogland, the bowing as jagged as the cliffs'. Written in memory of his fiddle teacher James Byrne, the piece comes together from two songs Doherty remembers Byrne playing – an air, the *An Londubh*, which opens the quartet, and a reel, *The Devil's Dream*, which inserts itself rudely into the music to dance its leering dance. The two battle it out, the air holding steady, as the devil elbows his way in again, the music roiling and recovering as the winner changes hands. An air, in this context, is a song melody played in a non-metric rhythm with phrasing based upon the lilt of Irish words, though often not sung. The reel, conversely, is a traditional dance tune – here, something of a dance macabre – that is much more strictly counted, making for a rich and complex quartet conversation.

Staying in the world of complex rhythm and conversation as influences, *Tsunami* – the new commission from Belgian composer Annelies Van Parys (born 1975) – takes its inspiration from the strange and otherworldly chatter of Japanese cicadas, shrilling and pulsing, somehow grippingly involving you in its dialogue. Van Parys first heard them in Tokyo parks during a residency at Tokyo Arts and Space, situated at the centre of the city. There was something in that sound 'not only [the] voicing, but also their rhythm ...' that became the kernel of the string quartet. 'The strength of their call was extraordinary to my ears,' Van Parys recalled, and it sat pulsating in her mind, ready to emerge in the piece she wrote for the Sonoro Quartet. The *Tsunami* of the title, then, is not one of water, but one of cicadas: enveloping, consuming, dominating.

Fellow Belgian Guillaume Lekeu (1870–94) was consumed, albeit briefly, by a different sound – the one created by his heroes, Franck, Beethoven and Wagner. Unlike other composers of his generation, who were interested in a new, lighter French sound, Lekeu, who composed prolifically from the tender age of 15, was chasing something new, something progressive. He said about his work, in a letter published by Luc Verdebout, that it would be '... weird, mad, horrible, anything you like, but at least it will be original'.

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He died too young, at just 24 from typhoid fever, leaving behind a collection of some 50 pieces, including a violin sonata, and the work we hear today: *Molto adagio sempre cantante doloroso*. An emotional piece, with the subtitle 'my soul is sad until death' – taken from words said to have been uttered by Christ when he went to the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives, Lekeu's *Molto adagio* asks of its players to 'always be singing painfully'. In its very slowness, he allows room for contemplation and for deep emotion to pour forth.

From Lekeu's interiority, we move towards the Eighth String Quartet of Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–75), composed quickly over just a few days in Dresden in 1960. He was in Germany to work on a film score, and found himself deeply moved by the city that had been destroyed by firebombing 15 years earlier. The quartet, inscribed 'in memory of victims of fascism and war', is as timely now as it ever was, though Shostakovich has hinted after the fact of its publication that the piece is purely autobiographical, highlighting his own political and personal struggles at home in Russia. Regardless of its emotional origins, the five movements, played without rest, are in turn moving, blistering, sinister and despairing. His composition speaks of both internal and external turmoil – something to which the medium of the string quartet is perfectly suited, being both the most intimate of art forms and the most expansive – the four players representative of the greatest troubles and triumphs of modern history.

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## Performers

### **Sonoro Quartet**

**Sarah Jégou-Sageman** violin

**Jeroen De Beer** violin

**Séamus Hickey** viola

**Léo Guiguen** cello

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