

Tanglewood 2022
Wednesday, August 3, 8pm
Florence Gould Auditorium, Seiji Ozawa Hall

DANISH STRING QUARTET

RUNE TONSGAARD SØRENSEN, violin

FREDERIK ØLAND, violin

ASBJØRN NØRGAARD, viola

FREDRIK SCHØYEN SJÖLIN, cello

SCHUBERT

String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D.810,

Death and the Maiden

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto; Trio

Presto

{Intermission}

Lotta WENNÄKOSKI

Pige (2022)

I. Vorüber, ach, vorüber! (Pass by, oh, pass by!)

II. Daktylus

III. Pigen og scrapbogen (The girl and the scrapbook)

SCHUBERT

“Death and the Maiden,” D.531

(arr. Danish String Quartet)

Notes on the program

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

String Quartet in D minor, D.810, *Death and the Maiden*

“Death and the Maiden,” Lied, D.531

In the astonishing series of chamber works that Schubert composed during the last half-decade of his tragically foreshortened life, he moved far beyond the precocious facility of his teenage years. (According to his own annotation on the manuscript of the Quartet in B-flat, D. 112, written in 1814, he dashed off the first movement in a mere four and a half hours—a rate of roughly one bar per minute!) Each of Schubert’s last three string quartets—D. 804 in A minor (*Rosamunde*) and D.810 in D minor (*Death and the Maiden*), both dating from early 1824, and D. 887 in G, composed two years later—exhibits increasing emotional depth and subtlety of expression. When one considers that the same five-year period also saw the creation of Schubert’s great Octet for strings and winds (1824) and his equally masterful String Quintet in C (1828), it’s apparent that his capacity for sustained work and concentrated inspiration remained unimpaired, in spite of the deteriorating health, debilitating bouts of depression, and financial worries that had plagued him since he contracted syphilis in late 1822.

In March 1824, Schubert told his friend Leopold Kupelwieser that he had “tried my hand at several instrumental works...two quartets...and an octet, and I want to write another quartet; in fact that is how I want to work my way toward composing a grand symphony.” The late chamber masterpieces, in their outsized proportions and elaborate thematic structure, were important milestones on Schubert’s symphonic path. But progress was hampered by the composer’s erratic mood swings. In his letter to Kupelwieser, he described his state of mind in the words of Gretchen at the spinning wheel that he had set to music years before: “My peace is gone, my heart is heavy, I can never find it again.” Another specter from the past haunts the Quartet in D minor: the darkly beautiful song that gives the quartet its nickname (performed in a string quartet arrangement at the end of tonight’s program). “Give me your hand. I am not cruel. You shall sleep gently in my arms,” Death whispers to the frightened girl in “Der Tod und das Mädchen” (“Death and the Maiden”). Whether intimations of his own mortality prompted Schubert to base the slow movement of his next-to-last quartet on the song he had written in 1817 is a matter for conjecture. Yet there is no mistaking the morbid sense of doom and impending loss that suffuses the *Death and the*

Maiden Quartet. And it is surely no accident that all four movements, unusually for Schubert and his contemporaries, are in the minor mode.

The opening Allegro, with its explosive outbursts and typically Schubertian major-minor instability, sets the tone for the quartet as a whole. Driving, insistent rhythms convey an air of grim inexorability. The movement culminates in one of Schubert's most vividly dramatic codas, which builds to a frenzied climax before fading into silence. The veiled, chorale-like opening of the Andante con moto is borrowed from the piano accompaniment of Schubert's song. Formally, the slow movement is a set of richly imaginative variations. But even absent the poetic association, it would be tempting to hear a dance of death in the first violin's angular gestures and acrobatic leaps. By the same token, the tug-of-war between first violin and cello in the third variation suggests the Maiden's frantic struggle with the Grim Reaper. And what does the movement's journey from G minor to G major signify if not a passage from fear to submission? The savage intensity of the Scherzo, with its lacerating cross-accents, is tempered by the D-major radiance of the middle trio section. Listen for the motif in dotted rhythm that runs through the entire movement; it will reappear, in slightly elongated form, in the main theme of the Presto—one of many subliminal threads that bind this mighty musical edifice together. After its initial headlong gallop, the finale proceeds by fits and starts. Often the music seems to wander off on a tangent, only to pick itself up and plunge forward again. Then, just as one senses that the four players have exhausted their energy, they make one last prestissimo sprint to the finish line.

HARRY HASKELL

Harry Haskell is a prize-winning author, editor, and cultural commentator who writes authoritatively on a wide range of topics, from American history to the revival of early music.

Lotta Wennäkoski (b.1970)

Pige (2022)

Lotta Wennäkoski belongs to a small but increasingly prominent cohort of contemporary Nordic women composers who have established international reputations in recent years. Like Finland's Kaija Saariaho (with whom she studied at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki in the 1990s) and Iceland's Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, Wennäkoski combines a fundamentally lyrical sensibility with a modernist musical language that reflects her interest in innovative tone colors and instrumental techniques. Her professional debut in 1999 led to a steady string of major commissions, such as the orchestral works *Sakara*, commissioned by Esa-Pekka Salonen for the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 2003, and *Flounce*, premiered in London in 2017 on the BBC's Last Night of the Proms. In the intervening years, Wennäkoski branched out into other genres, especially vocal music and works for the stage. In the latter category are an intimate monodrama titled *Lelele*, with a libretto by the composer compiled from firsthand accounts of sex trafficking, and *Regina*, a yet-to-be-produced opera commissioned by the Savonlinna Opera Festival centering around philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and his fiancée, Regine Olsen. "The main characters' central struggle involves distinguishing their own will from that of God," Wennäkoski explains, "a topic that seems not too distant in this spring of the coronavirus, regardless of one's worldview."

Despite her up-to-date musical vocabulary and penchant for topical subject matter, Wennäkoski approaches composition in the spirit of creative engagement with the past. "I feel it is important to have a dialogue with tradition," she says, adding that much of her music "inevitably involves dovetailing of and collisions between eras." A case in point is her 2003 chamber opera *N!*, set to poems by six contemporary women poets and based in part on Schumann's song cycle *Frauenliebe und -leben*. A similar time-warping impulse lies behind Wennäkoski's freshly minted *Pige*, which the Danish String Quartet commissioned as a companion piece to Schubert's *Death and the Maiden Quartet*. Although *Pige* (Danish for "girl") is designed as a freestanding work, the first of the three movements can also be performed on its own as a prologue to Schubert's quartet. The differences between the two compositions may be as telling as their similarities. Whereas Schubert often worked out his ideas at "heavenly length," Wennäkoski prefers "an economical approach and ideas with a crystallized identity more than overabundance or extended durations." (*Pige* is roughly half as long as Schubert's quartet.) And while Schubert's genius lay preeminently in the realms of melody and harmony, the Finnish composer writes what she calls "timbral music" that is infused with "a sense of airiness and space: I like to imagine that I'm kneading space into my texture, in all the in-between spaces, including vertical ones—in other words, silence."

The opening movement of *Pige* takes its title from the first line of Schubert's song "Der Tod und das Mädchen" ("Death and the Maiden"): "Vorüber, ach, vorüber!" ("Pass by, ah, pass by!"), pleads the desperate Maiden as Death beckons to her. "This 'maiden's song' has not found its way to [Schubert's] string quartet," writes the composer, "so I wanted to use its material in mine." Sporadic rests and wide, angular leaps bespeak Wennäkoski's commitment to silence. Not until bar 86 does the muted cello introduce a sustained melody, echoing

the Schubertian maid's plaintive "Ich bin noch jung" ("I am still young"). At the end, the two inner voices fall silent, while the cello sinks to a low C-sharp and the first violin climbs, step by anguished step, into the stratosphere. "The second movement 'Daktylus' borrows its idea from the haunting pulse of Schubert's chant of Death," Wennäkoski explains. "Something fierce and something soundless can be heard here." This melancholy dirge is characterized by the inexorable dactylic rhythm (long-short-short) of Schubert's song and a variety of special playing techniques (pizzicato, col legno, wide vibrato). The third movement, "Pigen og scrapbogen" ("The Girl and the Scrapbook"), springs to life with multilayered motor rhythms and swooping glissandos. "Schubert's quartet is wonderful music," continues Wennäkoski, "and 'death and the maiden' is a tempting and gloomy motif in art history. On the other hand, I just couldn't help seeing the motif also as the never-ending image of a dirty old man desiring the young female body ... The third movement thus turns its gaze to the girl herself." Wennäkoski's "scrapbook" includes allusions to both Schubert's music and her own, as well as to Sibelius's song "The Tryst," about a young woman who is betrayed by her lover, and Cyndi Lauper's modern feminist anthem "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." Schubert has the last word, albeit a tantalizingly ambiguous one: As the violins and viola bound upward in a vigorous motif from the D-Minor Quartet, the cellist (Death?) slowly rips a sheet of paper.

HARRY HASKELL

© 2022 Carnegie Hall, Used by permission.

Guest Artists

The Danish String Quartet

In 2021-2022, the Danish String Quartet introduced "Doppelgänger," an ambitious 4-year international commissioning project pairing world premieres from four renowned composers—Bent Sørensen, Lotta Wennäkoski, Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, and Thomas Adès—with four major works from the chamber music of Schubert. The "Doppelgänger" pieces are commissioned by the Danish String Quartet with the support of Carnegie Hall, Cal Performances, UC Santa Barbara Arts & Lectures, Vancouver Recital Society, Flagey in Brussels, and Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam. In addition to performances of "Doppelgänger," the Danish String Quartet gave more than twenty performances throughout North America in the 2021-2022 season, highlights including debuts at the University of Georgia, Virginia Tech's Moss Arts Center, Shriver Hall, and Virginia Arts Festival, as well as returns to Boston's Celebrity Series, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and Ensemble Music Society of Indianapolis. European highlights included tours of Denmark, France, Germany, and Amsterdam. In November 2019, as part of a multi-year residency with La Jolla Music Society, the Danish String Quartet played a series of five concerts mirroring the programs in its ongoing recording project with ECM New Series, PRISM. Each PRISM program explores relationships between Bach fugues, Beethoven string quartets, and works by Shostakovich, Schnittke, Bartok, Mendelssohn, and Webern. *Prism I* (2018) earned a Grammy nomination in the category of Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance; *Prism II* (2019) garnered a five-star review from *BBC Music Magazine*, "Best Classical Music of 2019" from *New York Times*, and "Classical Music You Must Hear" from Apple Music. *Prism III*—featuring Beethoven's String Quartet No. 13, Op. 131, Bartók's String Quartet No. 1, and Bach's Fugue in C-sharp minor, BWV 849 from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*—was released in March 2021. Since its debut in 2002, the Danish String Quartet has demonstrated a special affinity for Scandinavian composers, from Carl Nielsen to Hans Abrahamsen, alongside music of Mozart and Beethoven. The Quartet's musical interests also encompass Nordic folk music, the focus of *Wood Works* (Dacapo, 2014) and *Last Leaf* (ECM, 2017). The group takes an active role in reaching new audiences through special projects. In 2007, they established the DSQ Festival, which takes place in an intimate and informal setting at Copenhagen's Bygningkulturens Hus. The Danish String Quartet has received numerous citations and prizes, including *Musical America's* 2020 Ensemble of the Year and the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, First Prize in the Vagn Holmboe String Quartet Competition and the Charles Hennen International Chamber Music Competition in the Netherlands, as well as the Audience Prize at the Trondheim International String Quartet Competition in 2005. In 2009, the Danish String Quartet won First Prize in the 11th London (now Wigmore Hall) International String Quartet Competition. The Quartet was awarded the 2010 NORDMETALL-Ensemble Prize at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival in Germany, and in 2011, they received the Carl Nielsen Prize, the highest cultural honor in Denmark. Violinists Frederik Øland and Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen and violist Asbjørn Nørgaard met as children at a music summer camp where they played soccer and made music together. As teenagers, they began the study of classical chamber music and were mentored by Tim Frederiksen of Copenhagen's Royal Danish Academy of Music. In 2008, the three Danes were joined by Norwegian cellist Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin. www.danishquartet.com.