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**Arcanto Quartet**

Wednesday November 18 2015

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# From the Artistic Director

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Dear Friends:

We are so excited to be presenting a return visit of the fabulous Arcanto Quartet, a date I have been trying to secure ever since the last notes of their first performance at the Chan Centre faded into the ether. That was October 17, 2010.

These are four remarkable instrumentalists with brilliant solo careers of their own; when they come together they are truly an incredible blend. Antje Weithaas, Tabea Zimmermann, and Jean-Guihen Queyras have all played individual recitals on our series in the past, and next season one of them will be returning to Vancouver to do something special for us... but I'm not letting the cat out of the bag—yet!



Their program is an intriguing one. I wonder how many of you have heard, or even heard of the Purcell *Fantasias* before?

We would like to thank the Peak Group of Companies for sponsoring the Peak Performances at the Playhouse Series, of which this is the first concert. We are also most grateful to Lynn Kagan for sponsoring this evening's performance by the Arcanto Quartet.

Thanks too to our Season Sponsor, Odlum Brown, our hotel sponsor, the Westin Grand, and also to the City of Vancouver for its support.

I hope that you enjoy the performance.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leila Getz". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Leila Getz, C.M., O.B.C., DFA



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# Program

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PEAK PERFORMANCES  
AT THE PLAYHOUSE

## ARCANTO QUARTET

**Antje Weithaas** violin  
**Daniel Sepec** violin  
**Tabea Zimmermann** viola  
**Jean-Guihen Queyras** cello

Wednesday, November 18 7:30 pm  
Vancouver Playhouse

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HENRY PURCELL (1659-1695)

### **Three Fantasias**

Fantasia 19 June 1680, C minor  
Fantasia 19 August 1680, G major  
Fantasia 22 June 1680, D minor  
(approx. 12 minutes)

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)

### **String Quartet No. 3, Op. 94**

Duets  
Ostinato  
Solo  
Burlesque  
Recitative and Passacaglia  
(La Serenissima)  
(approx. 26 minutes)

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

### **String Quartet Op. 59, No.3**

Introduzione. Andante con moto  
Andante con moto quasi Allegretto  
Menuetto. Grazioso  
Allegro molto  
(approx. 31 minutes)

# Arcanto Quartet

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Antje Weithaas, Daniel Sepec, Tabea Zimmermann, and Jean-Guihen Queyras founded the Arcanto Quartet in 2002 after several years of playing chamber music together in various combinations. The four musical soul mates, who also share a close personal friendship, quickly took the chamber music world by storm with their spirited playing, fuelled by the joy of bringing music to life.

The Arcanto Quartet's concert debut took place in 2004 in Stuttgart. Since then, the quartet has performed all over the world: at New York's Carnegie Hall, the Palau de la Música in Barcelona, the Théâtre du Châtelet and the Cité de la Musique Paris, the Philharmonie Berlin, and the Vienna Konzerthaus. They have played at the Rheingau Music Festival and the Helsinki, Edinburgh, and Montreux festivals, and also toured Israel, Japan and North America.

So far the quartet has released five highly acclaimed CD albums on Harmonia Mundi, among them a recording of Schubert's String Quintet with Jean-Guihen Queyras' student Olivier Marron, and a recording of Mozart's String Quartet KV 421 and Clarinet Quintet together with Jörg Widmann.

Highlights of the 2015/16 season include performances at the festivals in Edinburgh, Schwetzingen, Lugano and Aix, at the Philharmonie Cologne, Mozarteum Salzburg and a tour of North America which will include concerts at Carnegie Hall, and Montréal, Chicago, and Vancouver. Their musical partners in this season will be the young cellist Maximilian Hornung and Jörg Widmann.

**Antje Weithaas** infuses every detail of music with an unpretentious and compelling intelligence and an unparalleled technical mastery. One of the most sought-after artists of her generation, she has played with Germany's leading orchestras as well as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra, BBC Symphony, and the leading orchestras of the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Asia. Since the 2009/10 season, she has been artistic director of the Camerata Bern. She has been a professor of violin at the Hochschule für Musik "Hanns Eisler" in Berlin since 2004.

**Daniel Sepec** studied with Dieter Vorholz in his native Frankfurt and Gerhard Schulz in Vienna. Since 1993, Daniel Sepec has been leader of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and he regularly performs as a soloist with the orchestra. Daniel Sepec's fascination with the richness of Baroque violin has led him to regularly lead the period-instrument Balthasar-Neumann-Ensemble. As a soloist he has appeared with the



Photo credit Marco Borggreve

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Academy of Ancient Music, the Wiener Akademie, and the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées. For his acclaimed recording of Beethoven Sonatas with Andreas Staier, Daniel Sepec used the composer's recovered violin, lent to him by the Beethoven House in Bonn. His 2010 recording of the *Rosary Sonatas* by Heinrich Ignaz was awarded the Jahrespreis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik. In 2014 he began a professorship at the Musikhochschule Lübeck.

**Tabea Zimmermann** studied with Ulrich Koch at the Freiburg Musikhochschule and with Sándor Végh at the Salzburg Mozarteum. As a soloist, she regularly works with the most distinguished orchestras, from the Berlin Philharmonic and London Symphony to the Israel Philharmonic and the Orchestre de Paris. She has recorded all the classics of the viola repertoire to great acclaim. A devoted performer of contemporary music, she premiered Ligeti's *Sonata for Solo Viola*, a piece dedicated to her. Tabea Zimmermann is also in high demand as a chamber musician, and works with artists such as Leif Ove Andsnes, Christian Tetzlaff, and Jörg Widmann. Following professorships in Saarbrücken and Frankfurt am Main, she has taught at the Hochschule für Musik "Hanns Eisler" in Berlin, where she has lived with her three children since 2002.

**Jean-Guihen Queyras** has performed with many of the world's great orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Philharmonia, Orchestre de Paris, NHK Symphony, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Tonhalle Zurich, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Budapest Festival Orchestra and Orchestre de la Suisse-Romande. His artistic residencies have included a "Carte Blanche" at the Aix-en-Provence Festival and projects in Utrecht's Muziekcentrum Vredenburg, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and Gent's De Bijloke. He was also Artist-in-Residence with the Hamburg-based chamber orchestra Ensemble Resonanz. This season he will enjoy a residence at Wigmore Hall. He is a professor at the Musikhochschule Freiburg. In the spring of 2016, he premieres Thomas Larcher's "Cerha," a commissioned work for solo cello and string orchestra.

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# Program Notes

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This evening the Arcanto Quartet offers us a chance to explore chamber music from the end of the 17th century to the recent past, sampling music for four players by Henry Purcell (1659–95), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), and Benjamin Britten (1913–1976).

## Henry Purcell

Long before the primacy of the string quartet, consort music for viols was a pre-eminent genre of instrumental music. Sixteenth century British composers such as William Byrd and Thomas Tallis wrote impressive polyphonic compositions for three, four, or five performers. Slightly over a hundred years later, the young Henry Purcell became the last major figure to explore this particular format. His early fantasias and *in nomines* for viols—compositions based on a particularly popular chant fragment—were created at the transitional moment when the older viol family of instruments was giving way to the more brilliant timbre of the violins.

Purcell's reputation as the first homegrown British composer to truly master the Baroque style is unassailable. Much of his music is indebted to Italian practice, yet his 13 fantasias demonstrate an implicit conservatism—close to the last gasp of an indigenous British string tradition.

What Purcell might have made of the sound and timbres of the modern string quartet is anyone's guess. But modern interest in the unique charm of Purcell's music has encouraged contemporary string quartets to program these varied and delightful compositions. Purcell had no more sincere admirer than Benjamin Britten, who adapted his Chacony in G minor for string quartet as early as 1948, in part to familiarize players and audiences with his distinguished predecessor's music.

## Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten's purely instrumental works have been somewhat eclipsed by the splendour of his creations for the opera stage, but his string quartets—written, conveniently, in “early,” “middle,” and “late” career—are gradually finding their way into the standard repertoire of the world's great quartets.

His first quartet, conceived in 1928, when the composer was 14, was a substantial four-movement affair immediately withdrawn, and not published until the 1990s. The “official” First Quartet dates from 1941, created during the composer's unsatisfactory self-exile in the United States. The Second Quartet was written four years later, just as Britten's first great opera, *Peter Grimes*, was being premiered in war-torn London. Characteristically, it pays extravagant homage to Purcell with an astonishing concluding Chacony.

Creating the Third Quartet had to wait until the final months of Britten's life. Commissioned by the Amadeus String Quartet in 1974, it is very much a final

summing up and a farewell. Some of its musical materials were quarried from Britten's last opera, *Death in Venice*, but it is by no means just a suite of best bits or recycled out-takes from that stage work.

Like Shostakovich, his composer friend of later years, Britten filled his music with coded references and intentional ambiguities, though it might seem that choosing to base an opera on Thomas Mann's tale of infatuation and the end of a life devoted to art is fairly unambiguous.

Whatever its sources, the Third Quartet is chamber music of the highest quality, rife with allusive references to the historical idea of the string quartet. Its five-movement structure, with such operatic focuses as "duets," "solo," and "recitative," relates to similar five-movement structures in two of the 20th century's other quartet masters, Bartók and Shostakovich, and reflects a conscious desire to push beyond the conventional classic four-movement quartet format. The use of Lydian mode in the second movement inevitably brings to mind Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 132, with its "Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity"—a fairly unpleasant bit of irony given the precarious state of Britten's health when he was writing the piece. The Burlesque evokes Mahler, one of Britten's abiding heroes, and his embittered scherzos.

Then comes the finale. Britten made a final pilgrimage to Venice in November 1975, where he created much of the music heard at the end of the quartet. It is his last use of the passacaglia/chaconne type of variations, an old pre-classical structure he employed with spectacular variety throughout his work. In opera Britten uses the form to underscore moments of great seriousness and drama, making it a potent symbol as well as a musical structure. In abstract contexts such as the finales of both the second and third quartets, it is left to the listener to ponder extra-musical meanings.

Britten heard a private run-through of the piece at the end of September, 1976, but died a few weeks before the quartet's premiere by the Amadeus in The Maltins, the concert hall Britten created near Aldeburgh, in mid-December 1976.

## **Ludwig van Beethoven**

By the time Beethoven turned his hand to the "Razumovsky" Quartets in the middle of the first decade of the 19th century, he was accepted as one of the major composers in Vienna. His flashy early years were over, and he was well-advanced into what scholars generally call his middle period, a compositional phase where he focussed on pushing boundaries and exploring new ideas.

Beethoven's three Opus 59 string quartets are central to the development of the string quartet as chamber music's most important genre. Beethoven accepted the four-movement sequence standardized by Mozart and Haydn—weighty first movement, slow movement, Minuet, and fast finale—but he expanded the classic idioms with his own unmistakable textures, formal devices, and harmonic language.

The nickname "Razumovsky" refers to one of Beethoven's patrons, Count Andrey Razumovsky (1752-1836), a Russian diplomat at the Austrian court. A player as well as a connoisseur, Razumovsky maintained a resident quartet (apparently sitting in occasionally as second violin) and commissioned Beethoven to write the three quartets

that have kept the count's name alive long after his career as a powerful figure in the complicated world of international diplomacy has been forgotten.

Beethoven did remarkable work in the three Opus 53 quartets, but not all his contemporaries got the point; indeed at least one writer recorded his reservations. An 1807 observer for the weekly music publication the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* described the compositions as "very long and difficult." The writer was by no means entirely negative, adding, "They are profoundly thought through and composed with enormous skill," before concluding "but [they] will not be intelligible to everyone."

This mixed review did not extend to the C major quartet, however—"Which by virtue of its individuality, melodic invention and harmonic power is certain to win over every educated music lover." As it has to this day.



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