



AFFINITY QUARTET



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Geelong Chamber Music Society

presents

# Affinity Quartet

*Affinity Quartet completes their 2024 Season with  
guest violin Shane Chen and guest viola Isabella Bignasca*

Friday 22 November 2024 at 7.30pm

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**Alice Chance** (1994) Australia  
New String quartet (2024)

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827) Germany  
String quartet No.2 in G major Op.18 No.2

*Interval*

**Franz Schubert** (1797-1828) Austria  
String quartet No.14 in D minor D.810 "*Death and The Maiden*"

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**Shane Chen, guest violin**  
**Nicholas Waters, violin**  
**Isabella Bignasca, viola**  
**Mee Na Lojewski, cello**

McAuley Hall  
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Kristoffer Paulsen

Melbourne-based **Affinity Quartet** earns its place as one of the most outstanding and awarded string quartets of its generation. At the 2023 Melbourne International String Quartet Competition AQ was awarded the top three prizes - the Monash University Grand Prize, the Robert Salzer String Quartet First Prize, and the Audience Prize – becoming the first Australian ensemble to win the competition in its 32 year history. This milestone followed Affinity's Second Prize awards at the Bad Tölz International String Quartet Competition (Germany) and the Mozart International String Quartet Competition (Austria). At the latter, Affinity Quartet was also awarded the Special Prize for Best Interpretation of a Contemporary Work for their performance of Brett Dean's String Quartet no.3 'Hidden Agendas'. In 2022 Affinity Quartet became the first Australian string quartet to reach the Finals of London's Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, winning Third Prize.

Committed to accessibility and renewal in the string quartet form, Affinity Quartet celebrates its 10 year anniversary in 2025. Their public programs have become synonymous with excellence in Australian chamber music, earning praise for 'captivating playing' (Süddeutsche Zeitung), 'flawless ensemble' (Limelight Magazine), 'highly committed' (The Age), and 'first class string playing' (Classic Melbourne).

Affinity Quartet performs and commissions new Australian works for string quartet. Première performances include works by Australian composers Brett Dean, Darrin Archer, Matt Laing, Tom Misson, Lee Bradshaw, and Sally Beamish (UK). Affinity's 2024/25 Season includes premières by Alice Chance (AU), Heloise Werner (France), Alexandra Vrebalov (Serbia), Nicole Lizée (Canada) and Fode Lassana Diabate (Mali). Since 2023 Affinity Quartet receives professional mentorship from Günter Pichler (Alban Berg Quartet) during annual residencies at The International Institute of Chamber Music, Madrid, which include live streamed concerts.





**Alice Chance** (1994) Australia  
New String quartet (2024)

This piece was born from an invitation to respond in some way to Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, alongside of which the work will be premiered. This infamous quartet, rich with terror and a surreal dancing quality, draws upon fantasy to enable the composer to confront the reality of his own imminent death. As a starting point, I decided to let myself be guided by a text, as Schubert was when he initially set *Der Tod und das Mädchen* to music in the lieder which went on to inspire the quartet. I went looking for a text, ideally brimming with as much fantasy and metaphor.



Having long been interested in fairy tales and folk tales, almost as much I'm interested in the French language and culture, I delved deeper into the writing of Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy ('Madame d'Aulnoy'), a late seventeenth century writer known as the mother of the French fairy tale. One of her most famous stories, *l'Oiseau bleu* (*The Blue Bird*), revolves around a princess, Florine, separated from her true love right before their wedding when her evil stepmother locks her in a tower and transforms her groom into a blue bird. In a particular passage, Madame d'Aulnoy describes the bird's repeat journeys to the local palace where he would sneak through the window and steal the most precious treasures, bringing them back to his princess as tokens of his love. Whilst the story doesn't deal with death directly, I noticed a strong parallel with the Schubert in its exploration of the themes of transformation, fear and loss.

My work recounts the blue bird's gifting of the three main treasures in the story and the princess' reactions -

- A pair of diamond earrings? She will only wear them if he visits twice as often.
- An emerald bracelet? She is so tightly bound by her love there is no use winding it around her wrist.
- A grand pearl watch? It is no use when hours stretch when he is away and speed up when he is near.

The piece reflects on the way we imbue objects with love and personal significance, how they at once comfort us and deepen the ache of missing the person who gave them to us. In the title, to further tie in the theme of death, I give a nod to Rossini's *Thieving Magpie*, which recounts the posthumous exoneration of a woman wrongfully sentenced to death for stealing, only for it to be discovered later that the thief was a magpie.

My deepest thanks to Musica Viva Australia and Affinity Quartet for this commission.

**Alice Chance**

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**Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827) Germany  
String quartet No.2 in G major Op.18 No.2

Beethoven was just 28 when he began composing this (actually his third) string quartet. At the time he was still a pupil of Josef Haydn and the work has a strong resemblance to a late Haydn quartet in the same key, dubbed the *Komplimentier-Quartett*, basically the 'quartet of bows and curtsies'. As with all six Op.18 quartets, this piece has a unique style - in this case a happy journey through sunshine. Of course Haydn is present (often Mozart) but already Beethoven is showing his superior style.

*Allegro*

*Adagio cantabile – Allegro – Tempo I*

*Scherzo: Allegro*

*Allegro molto, quasi presto*

These works were Beethoven's first venture in the medium of string quartet though he would have been very familiar with similar works by Haydn and Mozart. As time shows us, he became a complete master of the genre, maybe enough to say it became his most personal form of expression.

**Franz Schubert** (1797-1828) Austria  
String quartet No.14 in D minor D.810  
*Death and The Maiden*

The nickname alone is evocative. In 1824 Schubert was suffering with tertiary syphilis, he was broke, depressed and fully aware of the fact that he was dying.

*Think of a man whose health can never be restored, and who from sheer despair makes matters worse instead of better. Think, I say, of a man whose brightest hopes have come to nothing, to whom love and friendship are but torture, and whose enthusiasm for the beautiful is fast vanishing; and ask yourself if such a man is not truly unhappy.*

*(Letter to a friend, Leopold Kupelwieser, in March 1824)*

Just one year earlier he had produced a song cycle which made him the toast of Vienna - *Die Schöne Müllerin*. He also composed several works for piano, the famous octet and a handful of lieder. In 1824 Schubert returned to an earlier form, the string quartet, but this time it was not to make money or fulfill commissions, it was to be a vehicle for his own suffering. The nickname of this quartet comes from the use of a theme from an earlier song in the second movement, but the whole quartet has been dubbed "a dance of death".

This work often raises the notion of "program music" - so vivid are the images projected at the audience. "The first movement of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* string quartet can be interpreted in a quasi-programmatic fashion, even though it is usually viewed as an



abstract work”, writes Deborah Kessler (1997 American Schubert Institute). Always a matter of great musical debate, this “programmatic” flavour of many of Schubert’s works may explain their instant appeal.

*Allegro*

*Andante con moto*

*Scherzo: Allegro molto*

*Presto*

The first movement is “instability” - loud to soft, major to minor. Maybe what Schubert was feeling at the time. The theme from Schubert’s own song *Der Tod und das Mädchen* appears in the second movement, a set of variations, but the theme remains through to the end of the quartet. Schubert is doing what so many composers before and after him have done - borrowing from himself.

The third movement trio offers the only “breath of fresh air” but only briefly. Death then pervades the piece until the very last note. If the first movement is “instability” then the final movement is “madness” - unnerving in its relentless major minor transitions and out of control *tarantella*. It’s often said, madness and genius go hand in hand.

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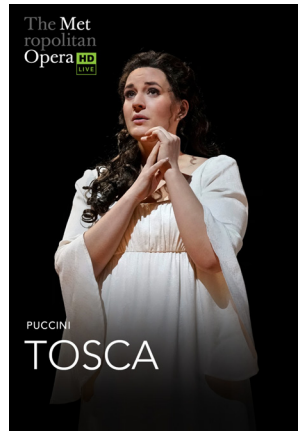




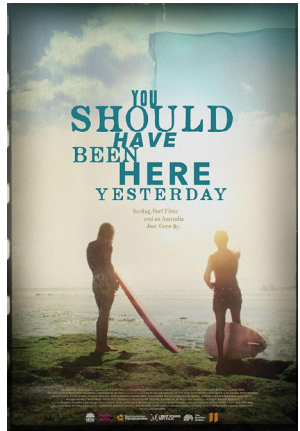
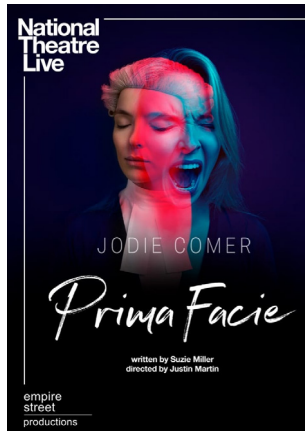
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