



ACACIA QUARTET • MOZART DVORAK CHANCE



"Acacia Quartet performed so well that at times they seem like only one instrument, such is their clarity and unison." City News, Canberra

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet no 15 in D minor, K421

1 *Allegro moderato* 8'40"

2 *Andante* 6'14"

3 *Menuetto (Allegretto) - Trio* 3'45"

4 *Allegretto ma non troppo* 9'38"

Alice Chance (b. 1994)

String Quartet No. 2: "Sundried"

5 *Exposure* 4'16"

6 *Dribble Castle* 3'27"

7 *Tomatoes* 2'49"

8 *Aloe Vera* 5'27"

Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904)

Quartet in F Major, Op. 96: "American"

9 *Allegro ma non troppo* 10'10"

10 *Lento* 8'10"

11 *Molto vivace* 4'27"

12 *Finale: Vivace ma non troppo* 5'53"



Lisa Stewart (violin) • Stefan Duwe (viola) • Anna Martin-Scrase (cello) • Myee Clohessy (violin)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet no 15 in D minor, K421

Allegro moderato

Andante

Menuetto (Allegretto) - Trio

Allegretto ma non troppo

When Mozart arrived in Vienna in 1781, Haydn held a reputation as the most celebrated composer of his age. Even though Mozart never formally studied with Haydn, his music exerted a profound influence on the young composer. This influence was particularly evident in the string quartet, which Haydn had virtually invented as a genre. His String Quartets Op.33, published in 1781, impressed the young Mozart, written as they were in a new way that made the four instruments equal participants in the musical discourse, with the cello freed from merely supplying the bass line. After a thorough study of these works, Mozart set about to compose his own six quartets composed between late 1782 and early 1785, known collectively as the “Haydn” Quartets as they were dedicated to his esteemed mentor. These six quartets show Mozart at the peak of his creative power. Unusual for the time, they were written solely on the basis of inspiration, not commission.

Composed in June 1783, K. 421 is the second of the “Haydn” Quartets and the only one in a minor key. The *Allegro* first movement, in the customary sonata form, begins with a brooding D minor main theme which paints an ominous mood, very different from what we usually expect from the ebullient Mozart. The more lyrical second subject is presented in a brighter contrasting

key, though its accompaniment maintains the sense of urgency and premonition of the preceding music. Both melodies are introduced by the first violin, which clearly plays the leading role in the ensemble. But Mozart’s conception of the string quartet, like Haydn’s, was fundamentally egalitarian, and he apportions the thematic material among the four instruments in a democratic fashion. The inner voices, in particular, are full of interest and variety. A tiny repeated-note triplet figure heard at the close of the exposition in the first violin serves as a motif that recurs in later movements. The development section is an intricate thematic workout with some bold harmonies. The recapitulation and coda iterate the strong emotions and masterful craftsmanship of this deeply affective music.

The *Andante* which follows starts out as a gentle, halting dance, sombre but tender, initially in the traditional relative key of F major but reverting much of the time to the darker D minor mode. The music is lyrical and the movement has a quiet dignity.

The *Minuet* continues in D minor in a more strident tone recapturing the turbulent emotion of the first movement. Here Mozart pushes the minuet far beyond its origins as a stately dance, exploring contrasts of tonality, texture, mood, and rhythm. By contrast, the *Trio* is a pleasant Viennese serenade complete with plucked string accompaniment in imitation of a guitar. Huge leaps in the first violin are reminiscent of Haydn’s witticisms.

The finale, *Allegretto ma non troppo*, is a set of variations on a sad melody in the 6/8

time of a ‘siciliano’, an Italian pastoral dance form. Brisk, dark, angry and still in D minor, it showcases each of the four instruments with virtuosic solos in variations notable for their harmonic elasticity. A brisk coda reaffirms the home key and brings the quartet to an exhilarating close.

Elizabeth Dalton, 2016

Alice Chance (b. 1994)

String Quartet No. 2: “Sundried”

Exposure

Dribble Castle

Tomatoes

Aloe Vera

Alice Chance is one of Australia’s fast-emerging young composers. She holds a Bachelor of Music in Composition from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where she was awarded the 2012 Ignaz Friedman prize for academic merit. Her music with its own distinct character encompasses several genres as she works with all kinds of musicians and is often invited to lead workshops as a composition or choral specialist. Alice has had works commissioned by the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra Fellowship, Sydney Children’s Choir, Australian Youth Choir and Sydney Youth Orchestras. She has completed composition residences in India and the USA, and worked as composer-in-residence with the Moorambilla Festival from 2013-2015. Her work is featured in the 2014 ABC documentary, Outback Choir and in the 2015 film, Wide Open Sky.

A Sundried String Quartet is her latest

composition, specially commissioned for Acacia Quartet and was premièred at the 2019 Bowral Autumn Music Festival. Alice describes her inspiration for the work and the sounds she has created to represent her ideas:

“As a person with synesthesia, I conceptualise music in vivid colours and textures. The idea of music gradually drying, burning, fermenting and wrinkling in the sun is hugely intriguing. For an audience member, listening to my work is the sonic equivalent of watching a time-lapse of a sun-drying tomato, and getting to taste its increasingly intense deliciousness all the while. If we imagine the composition process as picking raw ingredients from our brains’ vines and trees, and bringing them out into the air and onto the page, we can see how environmental aspects can strongly affect an idea’s growth. Primarily, this work plays with those ideas, however subtle commentary can be gleaned on our national struggle with drought, bushfires, climate change, and skin cancer.

“The first movement *Exposure* is the time-lapse movement. Stillness and transparency are portrayed by diaphanous light sounds with glinting harmonics, intervals of fourths and fifths, occasionally disorienting additive metres, increased dissonance that always finds breathing space and reprieve. Crystalline, watery material gradually dries in the sun and ferments into a spicy and surprisingly delicious crisped ending.

“The second movement, *Dribble Castle*, is playful. It mirrors the process of building a

sand-castle by “dribbling” wet sand into a pile, resulting in a bulbous, elegant castle. The momentum builds and then falls away. Playful, snappy pizzicati add to the funky music soundscape.

“The third movement is *Tomatoes*. If eating tomatoes had a soundtrack, it would be this movement. Imagine shaking a plant and hundreds of cherry tomatoes falling off. Bursting, fast passages, of scuttling semi-quavers are interspersed with spiky and sweet motifs.

“The fourth movement, *Aloe Vera*, is the cool salve, a soothing, mentholic antidote to the heat of the sun - the antithesis of the first movement. The music is homophonic with a simple ballad-like mantra of repeating and slowly developing phrases creating feelings of alleviation and relief – an exhalation, a lullaby, the refreshment of a huge glass of water or falling into bed after a day in the sun.”

Elizabeth Dalton, 2019

Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904)

Quartet in F Major, Op. 96: “American”

Allegro ma non troppo

Lento

Molto vivace

Finale: Vivace ma non troppo

Antonín Dvořák was the most prolific chamber music composer of the late nineteenth century. His natural and seemingly effortless proclivity for the genre resulted in a body of work that was unusual for a composer of the Romantic period, a time in which the exploration of large forces

and expansive forms had little to do with this intimate type of music most associated with the Classical era.

One of Dvořák’s best-known chamber music compositions is his String Quartet in F major composed in 1893. At this time he held the position of Director of the National Conservatory in New York; after an exhaustive season during which he continued to compose as well as fulfil his many obligations as a visiting celebrity, he was delighted to accept an invitation to spend the summer in the Midwest town of Spillville, Iowa. This tiny farming community of Czech immigrants who preserved the language, culture, and customs of their native land provided Dvořák with an environment he loved best. So after many months working in the hectic atmosphere of the big city, he was now once more in the company of all his children, who had come to America for the holidays, and surrounded by nature which he loved. He set to work immediately and within very short time completed the quartet which has become one of Dvořák’s most loved chamber music compositions, acquiring along the way the popular nickname, the “American”.

Quiet string ‘tremolandi’ provide the foundation for the viola’s opening theme—its rising-and-falling shape and sharp syncopations will provide much of the substance of the first movement. A cloud of darker emotion draws briefly across the music for the presentation of the complementary subject, a more restrained theme presented by the violin. Dvořák bases

both themes on the five-tone pentatonic scale. This arrangement of notes is a common feature of folk songs around the world; it omits the semitones found at the 4th and the 7th degrees of the more common classical scale yielding a specific quality of broadness, stability and a lack of tension (even in a minor key). Whatever influences or expressive intentions lay behind this choice, it imbues the quartet with a personality and a continuity that is distinctive and strongly evocative. The development section concerns itself first with permutations of the main subject and then with an imitative treatment of a motive derived from the dark-hued complementary theme. The fugato based on the second subject acts as a transition to the restatement of both themes which brings balance, formal closure and fulfilment to this most satisfying movement.

The *Lento* is one of Dvořák's most evocative slow movements. Its flowing, melancholic melody moves, without interruption and without major contrasts, in a single, sweeping arc against a background of an 'ostinato' figure. Starting quietly it builds gradually to an impassioned climax before fading to a subdued close, as the cello nostalgically plays the melody for the last time, accompanied by alternate bowed and plucked notes.

The third movement, a cheerful scherzo, provides an effective contrast to the second movement. It is constructed exclusively from a single, rhythmical theme and comprises two contrasting segments – a lively section in F major and a second section in F minor

which is an augmentation of the main theme. The movement also contains a further variant of the main subject which is heard several times high up in the top register of the first violin. It is a stylisation of the song of a bird which Dvořák heard while out walking in the countryside around Spillville. (Musicological and ornithological researchers have identified the bird as the scarlet tanager.)

The *Finale* immediately establishes a rhythmic pattern that may be an adaptation of native Indian drumming. The first violin dances its joyful tune in and around the continuing beat. Other melodies follow, all with the same high-spirited good humour. In the middle of the movement, the tempo slows, and Dvořák introduces a chorale, probably derived from one of the hymns that he enjoyed playing on the organ for services at Saint Wenceslas church in Spillville. Following the chorale is a shortened restatement of the main theme, leading to a resolutely happy ending.

Opinions vary as to whether the themes in this quartet were derived from Negro spirituals and American Indian music, or whether they simply resemble both American and Bohemian folk traditions in their melodic and rhythmic structure. What is incontrovertible is the fact that this joyful piece of music has maintained its status as a string quartet of universal appeal.

Elizabeth Dalton, 2018

In eleven years Acacia Quartet has won great respect for its versatile and inventive programs. Acacia has recorded ten albums, with 'Blue Silence' earning a nomination for an APRA-AMCOS Art Music 'Award for Excellence'. Acacia is passionate about supporting Australian composers, working with young musicians, and sharing their love of music with audiences of all ages. Its performances feature regularly on radio stations around the world. Acacia's engagements in Australia include the Sydney Opera House, City Recital Hall Sydney, Melbourne Recital Centre, as well as extensive touring through regional NSW and Victoria. Acacia had its international debut in Vancouver, Canada at the Roundhouse in June 2016. The following year, Acacia Quartet was invited by the Christine Raphael Foundation to give its European debut, where it performed concerts in Berlin and recorded a CD with three string quartets by Günter Raphael. Two CDs were released at the end of 2018, 'Muse' (MCD 587, Move Records) in collaboration with recorder player Alicia Crossley and 'Imaginations' with guitarist Matt Withers. Founding and current members are Lisa Stewart, Myee Clohessy, Stefan Duwe and Anna Martin-Scrase.

acaciaquartet.com



Acacia Quartet would like to dedicate this CD to Melanie Gustafson and David Scrase.

Special thanks to all of our wonderful supporters who have helped to make this recording possible.

The album was recorded in 2020 at the Orange Regional Conservatorium where Acacia Quartet is the resident ensemble.

Recording engineer and producer: Jayson McBride • *Cover illustration:* Lisa Stewart • *Photo:* Chris Donaldson • *Booklet:* Move Records

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