

# CASTLEMAINE STATE FESTIVAL 2021



19 MARCH-4 APRIL



## Goldner String Quartet- Around the World in 60 Minutes

We may not be able to travel overseas at the moment, so we thought that we could take you on a musical journey instead. Hence, you will notice that we have chosen colourful and evocative music by composers from Russia, Spain, Argentina, Germany/Austria, U.S.A. and of course, Australia. To undertake this journey from here it would normally require travelling around 46,000 kms but we will endeavour to capture the flavour of each country without you leaving your chairs and without spending 60 hours on a plane.

**Beethoven** is to the string quartet what Stradivari is to violin making—simply the greatest. His magnificent contribution of 17 masterful quartets begins with the set of six (Op 18), written between 1798 and 1800. In these early works, Beethoven has obviously learned much from Haydn and Mozart's great quartets, but is already striving to expand the limits of the form. His musical motives, usually incredibly succinct and distinctive, are especially so here in this genial and sunny first movement of Op 18 No 1. Beethoven is a master of constructing large structures out of the smallest units and in this movement he repeats the opening 6 note motive more than 100 times—just in case you missed it!

Australia is well-represented in this programme by composer **Ross Edwards**. Edwards has managed to create a unique sound world, driven by dance-like rhythmic energy, mesmerising and repetitive melodic elements, whilst also being inspired by Nature—especially that of Australia. Ross Edwards writes about this work- "For years I have found the ecstatic and mysterious sound-tapestry of the insect chorus in the heat of the Australian summer to be a particularly fertile source of inspiration." His White Cockatoo Spirit dance originates from 1998 in a version for solo viola. It is typical of his recent style and also exists in versions made by the composer for solo violin and string quartet.

So many Russian composers have that gift of beautiful melody writing -Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Prokofieff and Shostakovich to name only a few. Although **Alexander Borodin** was only a part-time composer (he was a distinguished chemist by profession) and his output is not large, he has managed to write some of the most memorable melodies ever written. He is admired for his colourful and exotic compositions and in this sublime and famous Nocturne from his First String Quartet, he exhibits all of these qualities.

From Russia we move toward the Latin countries. Spanish composer **Joaquin Turina** combines the rhythms and melodies of his native Spain with the sensuous sounds of the French Impressionists with whom he became acquainted during his studies in Paris. This unusual tone poem is entitled in English, The Bullfighter's Prayer. Turina wrote of this piece:

"One afternoon of bullfighting in the Madrid arena...I saw my work. I was in the court of horses. Behind a small door, there was a chapel, filled with incense, where toreadors went right before facing death. It was then there appeared, in front of my eyes, in all its plenitude, this subjectively musical and expressive contrast between the hubbub of the arena, the public that awaited the fiesta, and the devotion of those who, in front of this poor altar, filled with touching poetry, prayed to God to protect their lives."

After a murmuring opening, you hear unmistakably Spanish melodies and an exploration of the many moods that a bullfighter must feel prior to the event. The piece concludes in a suitably peaceful and heavenly manner.

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**Astor Piazzola** is another composer who, like Turina, studied in Paris with a notable teacher of the day, and at their urging, abandoned the idea of a traditional classical composer's career path, instead devoting himself to the music of his native country. He transformed the traditional Argentine Tango into the that known as Nuevo Tango -a fusion of Jazz and traditional Tango. His Libertango combines the words "Libertad" and "Tango" which symbolises his break with and freedom from the more traditional style.

Representing the USA, we are performing tonight the 2nd movement of **Samuel Barber's** only string quartet. Better known as the Adagio for Strings, it is one of the most profound and moving works by an American composer. Barber himself was a fine baritone and his innate sense of vocal line is evident throughout. There are also versions of this piece for string orchestra and unsurprisingly, choir. You hear it here in the original form from 1936.

Finally, we return to another fabulous Australian composer, **Matthew Hindson**. Celebration is his 5th string quartet and was premiered by the Goldners in 2017. Matthew has an affinity with the medium of the string quartet and in his compositions, he often revels in using the language and idioms of popular music, country music, techno music etc etc, transforming them for the concert hall in a most sophisticated way. The result is dynamic music often with driving rhythms and virtuosic passages for all concerned. As the title suggests, this is an uplifting work. It begins in a free manner, presenting the main musical ideas in a cadenza like section before settling into faster music which builds to a rousing finale.

A fitting way to come home to Australia after our journey around the world.