

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ROLSTON STRING QUARTET

Luri Lee, violin

Jason Issokson, violin

Hezekiah Leung, viola

Yoshika Masuda, cello

With their much-anticipated debut recording, *Souvenirs*, released in November 2019, Canada's Rolston String Quartet continues to receive acclamation and recognition for their musical excellence. As the 2018 recipient and first international ensemble chosen for the prestigious Cleveland Quartet Award from Chamber Music America, their accolades and awards precede them. In 2016, a monumental year, they won First Prize at the 12th Banff International String Quartet Competition (BISQC) and Grand Prize of the 31st Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition. That same year, they were also prizewinners at the 2016 Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition and the inaugural M-Prize competition. There is no wonder they were named among CBC Radio's "30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30".

In the 2017-18 season, they tipped the 100-concert milestone with performances throughout Canada, United States, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Israel. Highlights included the Smithsonian, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Koerner Hall, and the Esterhazy Palace. An even busier 2018-19 season included debut performances at Carnegie Hall in New York and Wigmore Hall in London, as well as performances at Freer Gallery, Chamber Music Houston, two major tours in Canada under the Prairie Debut and Debut Atlantic touring networks, and three European tours with dates in Leipzig, Berlin, Lucerne, Heidelberg, Barcelona, Graz, and other centres. As ludwigvan.com states, "they performed with a maturity and cohesion rivaling the best string quartets in the world".

Rolston String Quartet completed a two-year term as the Yale School of Music's fellowship quartet-in-residence in spring 2019. They have also served as the graduate quartet-in-residence at Rice



University's Shepherd School of Music and have participated in many other great residencies and fellowship programs.

Notable collaborations include performances with renowned artists Andrés Díaz, Gilbert Kalish, Mark Morris, Arthur Rowe, Robert McDonald, Donald Palma, Jon Kimura Parker, and Miguel da Silva.

Additionally, they have worked with songwriter Kishi Bashi and composers John Luther Adams and Brian Current. Primary mentors include the Brentano Quartet, James Dunham, Norman Fischer, and Kenneth Goldsmith, and the quartet has received additional guidance from the St. Lawrence String Quartet, Barry Shiffman, Miguel da Silva, and Alastair Tait.

Rolston String Quartet – Luri Lee (violin), Hezekiah Leung (viola), with new members Jason Issokson (violin) and Yoshika Masuda (cello) – was formed in the summer of 2013 at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity's Chamber Music Residency. They take their name from Canadian violinist Thomas Rolston, founder and long-time director of the Music and Sound Programs at the Banff Centre. The original members are all graduates of The Glenn Gould School (GGS), and it was at the GGS that the original members found their passion for chamber music and, under the guidance of Barry Shiffman, focused their artistic growth and ensemble playing. In addition, Ms. Lee, was an alumna of The Rebanks Family Fellowship and International Performance Residency Program at the GGS.

Luri Lee plays a Carlo Tononi violin, generously on loan from Shauna Rolston Shaw. The Rolston String Quartet is endorsed by Jargar Strings of Denmark.

Visit the artists' website at rolstonstringquartet.com

PROGRAM

String Quartet No. 59 in G minor,
Op. 74, No. 3

Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

1. Allegro
2. Largo assai
3. Menuetto: Allegretto - Trio
4. Allegro con brio

String Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 27

Edvard Grieg
(1843-1907)

1. Un poco andante - Allegro molto ed agitato
2. Romanze: Andantino
3. Intermezzo: Allegro molto marcato - Più vivo e scherzando
4. Finale: Lento - Presto al saltarello

NOTES

How to get paid for doing what they do has been the fundamental challenge for composers since the Stone Age, which is why extensive and sometimes harrowing financial stories so often turn up in these notes. Haydn's solution, after a period of freelancing in Vienna, was to get himself employed at the age of 29 by one of the wealthiest families in Europe, the Esterhazys. To begin with, he was the second in command – Vice Kapellmeister - of Prince Paul Anton's considerable musical establishment. He continued in this role when Paul Anton died the following year and was succeeded by his brother Nicolaus, an even more enthusiastic music-lover; a few years later he was promoted to Kapellmeister. His contract was carefully drawn up and detailed in its requirements: he was "obligated to compose such works of music as His Highness may demand... to reserve them entirely and exclusively for His Highness... and to compose nothing for any other person without prior knowledge and gracious consent". In return he received a regular salary and other payment in kind. Having to wear a silver braided uniform – part of the payment in kind - was probably no great burden; I suspect many of today's composers would gladly accept this stipulation for similar rewards. Haydn's relationship with the family had its complications and frustrations but he was to remain connected to them in some way for the rest of his life.

1790 was a watershed year in Haydn's association with the Esterhazy family. Nicolaus Esterhazy died and the new head of the family, his son Anton, disbanded the musical establishment. He did, however,

most of those appearances of his music were in the first 40 years of the Club's existence. We should remember, of course, that for the first nine seasons, Grieg was still alive and his was therefore contemporary music. What about the String Quartet? One movement – the last – was performed in 1929 and the only time the work has been performed in its entirety was in January of 1907, the year that the composer died. It is certainly due for a second performance.

The G minor String Quartet was written at the end of 1877 and the beginning of the following year while the composer was staying in the village of Lofthus, in the Hardanger district of Norway. He did not find the writing easy going. He had by his own admission been stagnating and this he put down in part to his work on what he referred to as "occasional" music, namely the incidental music to Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*. He elicited help from the German violinist Robert Heckmann, both on technical details, but also to bolster his confidence in what he had written. Heckmann begins one of his letters – and he is obviously responding to something Grieg had said - "I want to say that quite honestly I could find no sign in the quartet at all of your imagination being paralysed". In a letter to a Danish friend, Grieg said that the work "is not intended to bring trivialities to market. It strives towards breadth, soaring flight and above all resonance for the instruments for which it is written". That "striving for resonance" led some critics to complain that the work was too orchestral in concept; his usual publisher, Peters, refused to print the work on these grounds. Again it was Heckmann who came to the composer's rescue writing that "...There is not the slightest reason for rewriting your work... We will not on any account dispense with this characteristic tone-colour... it would be a pity if the quartet were to lose its present sonority and characteristic form". The piece was performed a number of times in Cologne by Heckmann's quartet and was well received. Heckmann told Grieg that it was loudly applauded and he wished he could send him a review. Unfortunately, there was no review because the critic's wife had given birth on the very night that the quartet was performed. Later, the same performers played the quartet in Wiesbaden where Liszt was among the audience. Heckmann reported Liszt's reaction: "It is a long time since I heard a new composition, particularly a string quartet, which has interested me as much as precisely this unusual and brilliant work of Grieg's". Not surprisingly the publishing firm, Peters, changed their mind and printed the score with the composer's dedication to Robert Heckmann.

-John Mayo

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