

The Stradivari Quartet

Four Stradivaris, perfect musical instruments, find four musicians who bring out of them all the height and depth of human emotion that music can express. Xiaoming Wang forms together with Soyoung Yoon, Lech Antonio Uszynski and Maja Weber the Stradivari Quartet. What unites them is their love of music; what drives them is their enthusiasm for using their musical talent to tell stories; technical perfection is a basic precondition which can be allowed to slip into the background. They breathe life into the completed work: the work of Stradivari and the works of the composers. This love is something that reaches to the heart that can be felt by anyone who is able and willing to listen.

Stories are a kaleidoscope of life. Stories fascinate, entertain, are handed down as tradition, stimulate the imagination, and represent identity, both individual and cultural. The musical interpreters of the Stradivari Quartet tell stories in their music, communicating with each other on the stage. With their passion they cause the music to come alive, they convey content to the public through their interactive story telling mode.

Stradivari instruments are inimitable in their tone. Their unique quality and the myth associated with it are part of the Stradivari Quartet programme. This presupposes a special communication between four string players who each have their own qualities and characteristics, as do the Stradivari instruments they play. There has to be room for spontaneous ideas, which any of the players can follow blindly. The story-telling quartet community lends wings to the listener's imagination, forming pictures in the mind that turn into the listener's own story. In this way playing becomes a declaration of love to the only protagonist: music.

Xiaoming Wang, Violin

Born in China in 1982, he started playing the violin at the age of four. Whilst still at school, he continued his musical development and education under Prof. Xu Lu at the Central Conservatory in Beijing, where he studied violin performance for ten years. His musical talent was promoted by the «Herbert von Karajan Center» and flourished under the tutelage of Gerhard Schulz in Vienna.

He competed with great success in the «Mi-Do-Violin-» and «Stephanie Hohl-Competitions» and won 1st prizes and the special award at the «Leopold Mozart-Competition». He has been concertmaster of the «UBS Verbier Orchestra» and the «UBS Chamber Orchestra», and in 2008 he becomes the 2nd concertmaster of the Zurich Opera Orchestra. He is a passionate table tennis player and spends his leisure time by preparing asian culinary delicacies and exploring South America.

«Since childhood I have loved playing music. Using two Chinese chopsticks I copied the violin playing of my father. Music is my constant companion and as essential to me as bread, just not as boring. As a part of my body and soul, I try to build spirited layers of sound with music – similar to a painting composed of different hues of colour. For me, Mozart epitomizes the ultimate musical vitality and perfection».

AUREA

The «golden violin» comes from Stradivari's «Golden Period» (ca. 1700-1720). During this period the master's genius reached maturity and he made his best instruments, including the Aurea, which was made in 1715. Presumably Stradivari proportioned this violin according to the «Golden Section» (sectio aurea), which is the name given to the special mathematical relationship according to which the smaller part relates to the larger part as the larger part relates to the whole. It was according to this geometric model that he calculated the optimum position of the *f* holes to produce the best sound. The result was this slim, manoeuvrable violin which is easy to play and shines with an incomparable fullness of tone. Its history can be traced from the middle of the 19th century, when it was owned by the violinist Prof. Bartl, who, after sustaining an injury to his finger, had the violin converted so that it could be played on the right. He played the instrument in this way for 40 years. It was probably in 1909 that the violin acquired a new owner. In that year it was restored, and since that time it has once again been played on the left. Its golden sound quality remains for us to enjoy.

Soyoung Yoon, Violin

Born in Korea in 1984, she received her first violin lesson at the tender age of five. Her teacher, Professor Nam Yun Kim, nurtured her impressive talent in Seoul before she transferred to Professor Zakhar Bron's masterclass in Cologne and Zurich. She gave dazzling performances at the world's most famous competitions and garnered countless prizes at the Queen Elisabeth Competition, Tchaikovsky Competition, Yehudi Menuhin Competition, David Oistrach Competition, Tibor Varga Competition and Georg Kulenkampff Competition. Her very special charisma and musical passion always enchant both judges and public alike. In her free time she recharges her batteries by reading, and she also relaxes by indulging in her favourite pastime of riding.

«For me, music is the most natural thing in the world. I have always loved playing the violin and being on stage because I can communicate the music to an audience. Through music I always meet interesting people everywhere I go. This is why music is quite simply part and parcel of my life, and it always will be».

KING GEORGE

This precious violin dates from 1710 and was named after its owner, King George III of England. In 1800 he presented it to a Scottish officer whose motto was «not without my Stradivarius», due to his reverence for the instrument. One of Wellington's cavalymen, he fell in the Battle of Waterloo on 18 June 1815. His violin «survived» and was found undamaged in his horse's saddlebag. Bernhard Molique, a student of Ludwig Spohr, was the next owner of the instrument. It was then owned by Baron von Dreyfuss, a student of Molique. The relationship between the Dreyfuss family and King George was more than just an affair, as it lasted until 1889. The Berlin violin expert August Riechers then became the new owner before the German American dealer Emil Hermann purchased the violin from Professor Meyer and sold it on to Tokyo. Before the outbreak of World War II it found its way back to Berlin by a route that remains undocumented.

Lech Antonio Uszynski, Viola

Born in 1986 in Italy to a family of Polish musicians, he grew up in Switzerland and began learning violin from his father at the age of six. He has also been playing the viola since the age of 13. He was later a double winner – in violin and viola – at the Swiss Youth Music Competition. He studied violin under Professor Ana Chumachenco and Professor Zakhar Bron in Zurich, and drew inspiration for his viola play from Rudolf Barshai. In 2001 he founded the «Trio Elegiaque» with his brother, and they went on to win the prestigious Gaetano Zinetti International Chamber Music Competition. Apart from his passion to music he loves to spend time in reading, with friends or skimming across Lake Zurich in his motorboat.

«I have been constantly surrounded by music since my earliest childhood. Early on I developed the need to share my love of music. I am fascinated by how a composer can tell us stories through his work, and the extent to which I, as a musician, can enrich these stories by incorporating my own personal experiences. For me, the greatest thing is sharing this personal interpretation with the public. In my view, chamber music is one of the most beautiful forms of music due to the synergy that comes about through collaboration and personal fulfilment».

GIBSON

This instrument was probably assembled by Antonio Stradivari's trembling hand in 1734, when he was ninety years old, and yet his skilled workmanship and artistic vitality make it an instrument of exceptional timbre and beauty. It is presumed to be his final contralto viola and is smaller than his tenor violas. It says more about the master and his work than the most valuable instruments from his «golden period». The Gibson really stands out due to its absolute perfection and its excellent condition after more than 250 years. This jewel of an instrument is named after the Englishman George Alfred Gibson (1849-1924), who was Professor of Violin at the Royal Academy, a famous soloist, and also the viola player in the famous «Joachim Quartet», in which he played this very instrument.

Maja Weber, Cello

Born in 1974 in Switzerland, she began playing the cello at the age of four, when the instrument was bigger than she was. Her teachers Prof. Frans Helmerson, Prof. Walter Levin and Alban Berg Quartet had a major impact of her adolescence. At a very young age she played in the family quartet and in the «Ars Amata Zürich», then formed the «Amar Quartet» with her sister, winning 1st prize at Bubenreuth, 2nd prize at Geneva and Graz, and the Millennium Award in London. She created the «Stradivari Quartet» and in doing so is pursuing her ideal of telling stories with music. In her private life also her passion remains communication; her family and friends occupy an important place in her life.

«My love of music is explained by its purity, with which it binds people together independently of their origin, language and culture. Where words fail, music speaks; music can say the unsayable. The communication and discussion between my colleagues, the different musical parts and the

audience are my passion. The huge diversity of emotional worlds and viewpoints makes chamber music my dream profession».

BONAMY DOBREE - SUGGIA

The English cellist Hancock played it, the English scholar Bonamy Dobree (who gave the instrument its name) owned it – this Stradivari cello was made in 1717. The moving story of this valuable cello actually begins with the mysterious, diva-like Portugese cellist Guilhermina Suggia (1885-1950), who when playing her favourite cello combined technical perfection and interpretative feeling into one, enchanting her public with both aspects of her playing and her warmth and depth of tone. Outwardly extravagant and lively, inwardly intelligent and warm-hearted, Suggia lived many lives: in Paris as the pupil and lover of Pablo Casals, in London as a «Grande Dame» and cosmopolitan figure, in Portugal as the yearning woman seeking her homeland. We are fascinated by such inexplicable beauty, the kind of beauty that Guilhermina Suggia and her cello represent. In the London Tate Gallery hangs the famous portrait by Sir Augustus John, in which he shows Suggia and her cello in harmonious unity. After Suggia's death the cello was sold; the proceeds used to provide grants for students at the Royal Academy of Music.

Our thanks to the Habisreutinger Stradivari Foundation

Our music goes hand in hand with a huge thank you to the Habisreutinger family and the foundation's trustees.

We are very fortunate that the St. Gallen textile manufacture and hobby cellist Rolf Habisreutinger began collecting valuable Stradivari instruments. We are very fortunate that the collection contains four of the most beautiful instruments that a quartet could wish to play on.

We give our thanks in music that aims to reach out to people's hearts.

It is a matter of particular importance to us to prove ourselves worthy of the confidence the foundation has placed in us.