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**New Zealand String Quartet**

# Secrets of Sea and Space

**2020 Teachers Resource**

**New Zealand  
Festival** OF THE ARTS

Wellington  
Community Trust  
supporting community initiatives

# CAST AND CREATIVES

**New Zealand String Quartet** [nzsq.org.nz/watch-and-listen/video/](http://nzsq.org.nz/watch-and-listen/video/) (New Zealand / Aotearoa)

First Violin

**Helene Pohl**

Second Violin

**Monique Lapins**

Viola

**Gillian Ansell**

Cello

**Rolf Gjelsten**

Since 1987 the New Zealand String Quartet has been New Zealand's leading chamber ensemble, with a distinguished record of international touring success and a body of acclaimed recordings. Much-loved by audiences at home and around the world, the Quartet performs over eighty concerts to popular and critical acclaim each year.

Career highlights have included highly-praised performances at London's Wigmore Hall, the prestigious Frick Collection in New York and in Washington's Library of Congress. The Quartet's extensive discography includes Brahms, Mendelssohn, Bartók, Ravel, Debussy, Beethoven, Schubert, Dvorák, Wolf, Berg, Takemitsu, Tan Dun and numerous New Zealand composers including the complete chamber works for strings by Douglas Lilburn. In February 2019 they released the final volume in a three-CD Brahms set for Naxos.

The ensemble has been Quartet-in-Residence at the New Zealand School of Music at Victoria University since 1991, where three of the members are Associate Professors. Violinist Helene Pohl and violist Gillian Ansell are co-artistic directors of the biennial Adam Chamber Music Festival in Nelson and the longest-serving Quartet members, who have been awarded the MNZM honour for services to music in New Zealand.



**Jenny Wollerman** Soprano (New Zealand / Aotearoa)

*... 'transformational performance', 'the extraordinary Wollerman held nothing back', 'positively transcendent', 'assured and lustrous-toned'...*

Jenny Wollerman is noted for her expressive interpretations of unfamiliar works and premieres. As well as Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 and *The Abiding Tides* (review quotes above, highlights include Jenny McLeod's opera *Hohepa*, *Fragments from Wozzeck* with Auckland Philharmonia, Harris's *The Floating Bride* with NZSO, and Anthony Ritchie's *Stations: Symphony No. 4* recording - nominated for MusicWeb International's 2015 Recording of the Year. Senior Lecturer in Voice at New Zealand School of Music, she is one of New Zealand's best known sopranos.

## Reviews

"[In] Ross Harris's song-cycle *The Abiding Tides*... the extraordinary Wollerman ... held nothing back in characterising these songs. Wollerman was moving as the Eternal Mother ... clear confident lines against Harris's complex and sometimes sumptuous textures ... relishing the extra interpretative scope given." **William Dart, New Zealand Herald**

"Stunning ... Superb ... Magical" **NEW ZEALAND HERALD on Quintessence: The Mozart and Brahms Quintet Experience**

# ABOUT THE SHOW

In their new programme, *Secrets of Sea and Space*, the New Zealand String Quartet, joined by soprano Jenny Wollerman, transport you with Arnold Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2. The Schoenberg is paired with a quartet by one of his most celebrated students, Alban Berg, who furthered his mentor's twelve-tone technique with *Lyric Suite*.

The programme concludes with Ross Harris's ode to the unforgiving oceans, *The Abiding Tides*. Originally commissioned for Wollerman and the New Zealand String Quartet, the piece uses poems by Vincent O'Sullivan, whose premise, "the sea has no favourites", concedes to an ocean as vast as it is uncompromising. Adventurous spirits will be rewarded by this exquisite programme.

## **Arnold Schoenberg: String Quartet No. 2 (1908)**

The Austrian composer wrote this piece during a very emotional time in his life, it is dedicated to his wife, who was having an affair with their neighbour. Schoenberg was moved by the work of German poet Stefan George and included in the piece a solo voice utilising the poems *Litany* and *Rapture*. It was a departure in style for Schoenberg and the first performance caused a scandal, the audience crying out for it to stop. Today it is considered a visionary work and has inspired the compositions of many others including his student Alban Berg.

## **Alban Berg: Lyric Suite (1925-6)**

Inspired by Schoenberg's integration of poetry into his music, Berg experimented with his own combination of words and sound. He had already enjoyed success with his opera *Wozzeck* and was becoming well known as a musical dramatist. Although not an opera, the work has the feeling of accompanying a story, with emotional highs and lows. In the 1970s it was discovered that the work did hide a secret narrative – when a score annotated by Berg was found it revealed a forbidden love affair with Hanna Fuchs-Robbetin, a married friend of a friend. Her annotated copy had the following inscription from Berg "I have written...meanings into the score for you (for whom, and only for whom – in spite of the official dedication on the following page – every note of this work was written)."

## **Ross Harris: The Abiding Tides (2012)**

*The Abiding Tides* is a set of poems written by Vincent O'Sullivan for composer Ross Harris to set to music. Commissioned for the New Zealand Symphony Quartet and Jenny Wollerman it has been recorded in *Making light of time: songs by Ross Harris and Vincent O'Sullivan* (Atoll).

"*The Abiding Tides* was commissioned by Jack Richards for soprano Jenny Wollerman and the New Zealand String Quartet. The work is a setting of a series of poems about ships sinking at sea. While the string quartet obviously acts as an accompaniment to the voice there are also musical interludes that give the instrumental ensemble the opportunity to comment on the unfolding narrative" Ross Harris, Composer

"*The Abiding Tides* is a group of poems specifically written for Ross Harris to set to music. The sea has no favourites. Some of the figures and voices in the songs are rich, some are poor. They are young and old. Some of the songs concern the most privileged of disasters, the sinking of the Titanic; others relate to 'Boat People', their stories as recent as last month, or for all we know, this afternoon. The words of the final song are from ecclesiastical Latin, their emphasis on a God who cannot be understood" Vincent O'Sullivan, Poet

# FURTHER RESOURCES AND READINGS

## WATCH

Relive *The Abiding Tides* in this video with Jenny Wollerman and the New Zealand String Quartet: [vimeo.com/145902489](https://vimeo.com/145902489)

## READ

Read about Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 and why artist Wassily Kandinsky suggested they were 'kindred spirits': [brentanoquartet.com/notes/schoenberg-quartet-2/](https://brentanoquartet.com/notes/schoenberg-quartet-2/)

Find out about the controversy behind String Quartet No. 2: [theguardian.com/music/2009/jan/17/classical-music-schoenberg](https://theguardian.com/music/2009/jan/17/classical-music-schoenberg)

Learn more about Ross Harris, the New Zealand composer of *The Abiding Tides*: [sounz.org.nz/contributors/1049](https://sounz.org.nz/contributors/1049)

10 questions with...

Vincent O'Sullivan: [nzsqa.org.nz/news-and-reviews/item/10-questions-vincent-osullivan](https://nzsqa.org.nz/news-and-reviews/item/10-questions-vincent-osullivan)  
The NZSQ: [nzsqa.org.nz/news-and-reviews/item/10-questions-new-zealand-string-quartet](https://nzsqa.org.nz/news-and-reviews/item/10-questions-new-zealand-string-quartet)

## LISTEN

BBC Sounds explore the ground breaking music of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Vienna, the period when Schoenberg and Berg were both working: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p01nq5q8>

Listen to Jenny Wollerman with Jian Liu (piano) and the New Zealand String Quartet performing *Making Light of Time: songs by Ross Harris and Vincent O'Sullivan*: [atoll.co.nz/album/making-light-of-time/](https://atoll.co.nz/album/making-light-of-time/)

Explore the imaginative programming of the New Zealand String Quartet: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/collections/concerthall/NZSQ>

## GO FURTHER

Both Harris's *The Abiding Tides* and Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 are set to poetry. Read the poems they are set to. How have the themes of the poetry been captured in the music?

Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 2

Stefan George: *Litany* [oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2221](https://oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2221)

Stephan George: *Rapture* [oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2222](https://oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2222)

Ross Harris, *The Abiding Tides*

Vincent O'Sullivan: [sounz.org.nz/works/20114](https://sounz.org.nz/works/20114)

# PROVOCATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

## PRE-FESTIVAL

Read about the different pieces of music you are going to see. What is the background of the pieces? Where are the different composers from? When were they written? Why were they written?

Read about the New Zealand String Quartet and Jenny Wollerman. Who are they, what instruments do they play and what have they performed in the past?

Using the information the class has available (past experiences, advertising, reviews and videos) talk about what you might expect from the performance.

## AT THE FESTIVAL

What type of building is the performance held in and how does this effect your relationship to the music? How has the space been set up for the performance?

What emotions, feelings and thoughts do you have while listening to the music?

Notice how the performers behave when on the stage and moving on and off? Do they have stage presence? How do they achieve this?

## AFTER THE FESTIVAL

Did you enjoy this style of music? Why?

Did the performers express a range of emotions through their music making? How?

How successful were the musicians at keeping the audience engaged throughout the performance?

Did you see any instruments you haven't seen before? Which ones?

Do you have any questions about the performance? What are they and what can you find out to answer them?

Compare and contrast the three pieces. What was similar, what was the same?

*The Abiding Tides* is set to poetry by Vincent O'Sullivan, themed around the sea. Did you pick up on these references? What ways was the sea as inspiration incorporated into the composition?

How is listening to musicians perform live different to listening on a CD or digital recording? What did you enjoy about the live performance? Was there anything you didn't enjoy?

The New Zealand String Quartet have been playing together for 30 years. What skills would you need to work together in an ensemble? What would be difficult about this? What would be fun or exciting?

Try writing your own piece of music to accompany a favourite poem. This could be done as a class or individually. Think about how the themes of the poem are reflected in the tempo, tone, melody, structure and pitch.

**Need something more? Contact your SchoolFest team with any questions about the performance.**

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