

Friday, April 14, 2023, 8pm  
First Congregational Church, Berkeley

## Danish String Quartet

Frederik Øland, *violin*  
Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen, *violin*  
Asbjørn Nørgaard, *viola*  
Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin, *cello*

### PROGRAM

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)    String Quartet in A minor, D. 804,  
*Rosamunde*  
   Allegro ma non troppo  
   Andante  
   Menuetto: Allegretto – Trio  
   Allegro moderato

### INTERMISSION

SCHUBERT    *Quartettsatz* in C minor, D. 703

ANNA THORVALDSDOTTIR (b. 1977)    *Rituals* (Bay Area Premiere,  
Cal Performances Co-commission)  
   *Commissioned by the Danish String Quartet*  
   *with the support of Cal Performances, Carnegie Hall,*  
   *Vancouver Recital Society, UC Santa Barbara Arts*  
   *& Lectures, Washington Performing Arts, Flagey*  
   *& Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ.*

SCHUBERT    “Gretchen am Spinnrade”  
   (*Lied arranged for string quartet by*  
   *the Danish String Quartet*)

*The Danish String Quartet has recorded for ECM, DaCapo, and CAVI-Music/BR Klassik.*

*Major support provided by The Bernard Osher Foundation.*

# Seeing Double

## The Doppelgänger Project

by Thomas May

*Mir graust es, wenn ich sein Antlitz sehe—  
Der Mond zeigt mir meine eigne Gestalt*

*(It horrifies me when I see his face  
The moon reveals my own likeness)*

Chillingly, these words from Franz Schubert's song "Der Doppelgänger," taken from Heinrich Heine's 1827 *Buch der Lieder*, depict an uncanny moment of recognition. Franz Schubert set this text to music in 1828—shortly before his death—as part of a collection that was published posthumously under the title *Schwanengesang* ("Swan Song"). Jeremy Geffen, executive and artistic director of Cal Performances, likens the song to "a *Twilight Zone* episode in four minutes."

Heine himself left this poem untitled to intensify the degree of shock and surprise when the narrator realizes he is seeing his *Doppelgänger*, whereas Schubert clues us in to the troubled emotional atmosphere with the ominous chord sequence heard at the outset. Here, already, is a phase in the process of responding and remaking a source that we might call "doppelgänging," in the spirit of the Danish String Quartet's (DSQ) ambitious Doppelgänger Project, an initiative that reconsiders four of Schubert's greatest chamber music compositions in the context of newly commissioned works, each given a program of its own.

The fuzziness around the German word *Doppelgänger* is intentional. On the one hand, the word is used simply to refer to a harmless lookalike (a person who can even be sought out online via image recognition

apps or who can be conjured via rapidly evolving AI technology). But the mythic implications of this phenomenon reach deep into the psyche, providing an obsessive trope for the Romantics. (The novelist Jean Paul, a favorite of Mahler, has been credited with coining the term.)

The notion of deceptively identical appearances that can disguise polarities opens up yet another dimension embedded within the concept. One of Schubert's own friends described the composer as having "a double nature—inwardly a kind of poet and outwardly a kind of hedonist."

"I think everybody has an idea of what a *Doppelgänger* is," says DSQ violist Asbjørn Nørgaard. "It can be a very mystical term filled with images and history and philosophy, but it's also something that is a very physical thing." Similarly, in the process of commissioning the four composers, the DSQ wanted to give ample leeway to each to interpret for themselves how to respond or react to the Schubert work with which they have been paired. "We only created the framework. They might choose to quote the Schubert piece or they might write something completely different. We didn't know beforehand how they would respond to the challenge."

Indeed, the responses have so far been remarkably varied in strategy and character. The DSQ launched their cycle in the fall of 2021 with a contribution by the Danish composer Bent Sørensen (born in 1958), in whose Schubertian title, *Doppelgänger*, they found a name for the entire project. Sørensen deliberately incorporated *Doppelgänger*-like gestures into his score—a



*Not to Be Reproduced*, 1937, by René Magritte

product of the pandemic lockdowns—in response to Schubert's vast final work in the genre, the String Quartet in G major of 1826 (D. 887).

*Pige*, by the Finnish composer Lotta Wennäkoski (born in 1970 and a former student of Kaija Saariaho and the late Louis Andriessen), entailed an even more overt reaction to its counterpart: Schubert's best-known quartet, *Death and the Maiden* (D. 810, from 1824). The Danish word *pige* is an equivalent to *Mädchen* or “maiden” and suggests the new perspective Wennäkoski brings to her piece. Referring to the dialogue between Death and the young girl in the song from which Schubert drew for the slow movement of his D minor Quartet, she explains: “I wanted to include the young girl's song in my piece, whereas Schubert uses only Death's song.”

In April 2023, the DSQ continues the reverse-chronological sequence of late Schubert quartets with a program combining the A minor Quartet, D. 804 (*Rosamunde*), written earlier in 1824, with Anna Thorvaldsdottir's intriguing new work *Rituals*. The Icelandic composer's response to the DSQ's commission represents the opposite end of the spectrum: instead of reacting to or commenting on the Schubert, Thorvaldsdottir opted for no explicit engagement at all, adapting her unique sonic language and use of atmosphere to the string quartet medium. Yet whether by coincidence or as still another manifestation of the uncanny tendency for *Doppelgängers* to appear where you least expect them, her use of repetition in shifting contexts suggests a resemblance with what Nørgaard calls “the ritualistic repetition of gestures” in the *Rosamunde* Quartet.

The fourth and final commissioned work, to be unveiled next season, is a string quintet by Thomas Adès, which will be twinned with Schubert's String Quintet in C major, D. 956, from his final year. Why the geographical shift from the other three Nor-

dic Sea composers? Nørgaard explains that Adès has a strong affinity for the music of this region, as the DSQ showed on their 2016 album *Adès, Nørgård & Abrahamsen*.

“On one side, we wanted composers we like to work with, who have a musical language that we like,” says Nørgaard, describing their criteria for choosing the Doppelgänger Project composers. “But we also wanted something new, something different.” In this way, the DSQ, who have burnished their reputation as excitingly fresh and insightful interpreters of the classical canon, have been opening up new horizons.

Assessing reactions midway through the project, Nørgaard singles out how Wennäkoski's *Pige* was “very elegantly connected to *Death and the Maiden* in its commentary on gender roles—so that the performance of that piece became a comment on the very industry where the performance took place. It's exciting to be able to make classical chamber music relevant by putting Schubert in a context so that the concerts become an open discussion—not just about the music but about the historical impact and cultural debates going on today.”

The Doppelgänger Project, according to Jeremy Geffen, resonates with the Cal Performances mission: “It is incumbent on any arts organization to move the repertoire forward, to create those works that in 50 years will be considered canonical. So this project very much aligns with Cal Performances, which has a history of taking risks in supporting new work. I appreciate so much the curiosity of our audience, as well as the fact that the DSQ are using their platform to lift up contemporary composers.”

*Thomas May is a writer, critic, educator, and translator. Along with essays regularly commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony, the Juilliard School, and other leading institutions, he contributes to the New York Times and Musical America and blogs about the arts at [www.memeteria.com](http://www.memeteria.com).*

The Danish String Quartet (DSQ) first brought its Doppelgänger Project to Cal Performances in the fall of 2021. Pairing four newly commissioned works with milestones from Franz Schubert's chamber music, the project began with a combination of the String Quartet in G major (D. 887) and the Danish composer Bent Sørensen's *Doppelgänger* Quartet. This was followed last spring by a program including *Death and the Maiden* and *Pige* by the Finnish composer Lotta Wennäkoski—an incisive counterpart to Schubert's most-famous quartet that, in keeping with our early-21st-century *Zeitgeist*, deconstructs Romantic assumptions about gender identity.

This latest installment in the project juxtaposes Schubert's return to quartet writing, after a hiatus of several years, with Anna Thorvaldsdóttir's new work *Rituals*. The *Rosamunde* Quartet in A minor was the only Schubert string quartet published during his lifetime yet, according to DSQ violist Asbjørn Nørgaard, has been eclipsed in popularity by the two quartets that followed it. He finds the *Rosamunde* the most challenging of the three to interpret, although on a technical level it is considered the easiest. "With *Death and the Maiden*, for example, you can make a lot of drama. But the characters and colors in *Rosamunde* are very close to each other and shift subtly, with small blocks of notes that are repeated many times; this requires more-mature musicianship to phrase."

These "ritualistic repetitions of gestures" share a quality with *Rituals*, even though Thorvaldsdóttir chose not to respond directly to her "companion" piece when fulfilling the commission. Nørgaard posits a relationship with the Schubert in the sense that in both works, "power is harvested in the repetition of things. It's an experience different from when a piece has traditional melodies and developments. Both pieces have a meditative element. They take you

into a different state of mind, and then you stay there for a while."

Also included in the program is *Quartett-satz* (the German simply means "quartet movement"), which dates from the end of 1820—a year after the beloved *Trout* Quintet—and signals a turn in the direction of Schubert's final three masterpieces in the genre. And, as in their other Doppelgänger Project concerts, the DSQ bookend the program with their own arrangement of a Schubert *Lied* related to the opening quartet.

### Layered Melancholy, Subtextual Lieder

The *Rosamunde* Quartet in A minor (not the composer's nickname) marked Schubert's return to the string quartet medium in 1824, after a pause of several years. Members of the Schuppanzigh Quartet (which performed Beethoven's groundbreaking late quartets) premiered the piece. The young composer, then 27, had been accepted as a performing member by Vienna's Society of Music Lovers three years before. He had come to a keener understanding of the potential lurking within the Classical genres through his appreciation of Beethoven. These factors may underlie his renewed interest in the string quartet as well as the ambition of his symphonic projects (including the *Unfinished* Symphony of 1822 and the *Great C* major Symphony, which he began in the wake of the 1824 premiere of Beethoven's Ninth).

Yet alongside these increasingly sophisticated musical visions—visions that arguably surpassed those Beethoven had pursued at the same age—Schubert was weathering intense depression and the ongoing anxiety caused by incurable syphilis, which he had contracted in 1822. "I feel myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world," he famously confessed in a letter dated March 31, 1824. "Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, a man whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom love and friendship have



Caroline Bittencourt

nothing to offer but pain, whose enthusiasm for all things beautiful is gone, and I ask you, is he not a miserable, unhappy being? Each night, on retiring to bed, I hope I may not wake again, and each morning but recalls yesterday's grief."

Schubert had also suffered the bitter disappointment of an unrequited love for opera. His two most significant forays into the genre, *Alfonso und Estrella* and *Fierabras*, had been rejected in 1822 and 1823, respectively. In 1823, he also penned an incidental score to the Romantic drama *Rosamunde, Princess of Cyprus* by the journalist and amateur fiction writer Helmina von Chézy. The production was withdrawn after a mere two performances. In contrast to the devastating reviews, Schubert is said to have described the drama as "fully convincing right from the first time you read it." The play's original text is no longer even extant, though a revision was later discovered. The story tells of the titular heroine and her ultimately successful quest to be restored to her rightful royal position.

*Rosamunde* prompted Schubert to write 10 numbers: choruses, ballets, and en-

tr'actes, as well as the *Romanze* "Der Vollmond strahlt auf Bergeshöhen." Together with the *Romanze*, the entr'acte following the third act has become a popular extract from this incidental score, its ethereal theme ranking among Schubert's most enchanting melodies. It pleased Schubert himself so much that he reused it in the Andante of the A minor String Quartet (as well as in the third of the Four Impromptus, D. 935).

*Rosamunde* is not the sole external source for this heavily subtextual, self-quoting quartet. Its opening measures recall the anxious ambience of Schubert's breakthrough song from a decade before, "Gretchen am Spinnrade"—a new arrangement of which the DSQ has made for string quartet to conclude this program—as well as of the still-more-ominous preludial measures to the *Unfinished* Symphony of 1822. Still another subtext of longing for what has been lost emerges in the third movement (a minuet rather than a scherzo), which quotes from Schubert's extraordinary 1819 setting of Friedrich Schiller's poem "Die Götter Griechenlandes" ("The Gods of Greece").

A layered melancholy thus permeates the A minor Quartet, in which the *Rosamunde* melody (transposed to C major from its original B-flat major) becomes a kind of stand-in for the sense of lost innocence conveyed by these very disparate *Lieder*. The variations it undergoes in the Andante transform its disarming simplicity into Schubert's signature ambivalence. Added to this is Beethoven's influence, as evidenced by the simple rhythmic pattern (long–short–short–long–long) that echoes the Allegretto of his Seventh Symphony. The finale, like the previous three movements, begins pianissimo. Its rustic atmosphere and folklike ambience inform a combination of rondo and sonata architecture. A kind of cheerful delicacy here makes for a curiously subdued counterpart to the headlong death dance with which the *Rosamunde*'s immediate successor, *Death and the Maiden*, will be driven to its end.

### A Gateway to the Late Quartets

Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony in B minor from 1822 is one of the most famous musical torsos in the classical repertoire. *Quartettsatz* represents a parallel situation in the medium of chamber music. Enhancing the mystique of both is the fact that the incompleteness of these works resulted not from Schubert's premature death but from what is thought to have been a creative block. After completing this C minor movement, he drafted 41 measures of a slow movement in A-flat major but then abandoned the quartet-in-progress. *Quartettsatz*, like so many of Schubert's compositions, remained an unknown gem during his life and wasn't published until 1870 (when it appeared as the Quartet No. 12).

The restless energy of the opening gestures already breathes the same air as the beginning of the *Unfinished* Symphony. There's even an anticipation of the life-or-death urgency we recognize from the outer movements of *Death and the Maiden*. This unsettling agitation colors the whole move-

ment—a persistent subtext, even when temporary refuge seems to beckon in the lyrical consolation of the second theme. Schubert underscores this ambivalence by reversing the order of presentation in the recapitulation, ensuring that the overly agitated material has the final say, driving us onward, through surprising harmonic detours, to the peremptory final chords that bring *Quartettsatz* to an abrupt halt.

### "An Ecosystem of Materials"

Anna Thorvaldsdottir grew up in a town that was small even in the context of sparsely populated Iceland; only later, as a college student, did she move to Reykjavík, the capital city. But her family was musical and encouraged young Anna's interest in playing the cello—though the town had only a violin teacher available to teach her the instrument. It was at the Iceland Academy of the Arts in Reykjavík that she started finding her voice as a composer.

"I like working with timbre and texture on an individual instrumental level," Thorvaldsdottir remarked on a podcast interview with NPR, adding that the particular nuances and gestures that make her music as recognizable as a painter's signature brushstroke are her equivalent of melodies: "I allow them to move from one instrument to the next [as they present] sounds and textures in waves. I also like to morph sounds, to find ways for different elements and sounds to speak to each other and become one another through a natural progression."

Thorvaldsdottir is especially acclaimed for the large-scale orchestral canvases in which she has developed this language, such as *Dreaming*, her breakthrough composition from 2008. Along with works for orchestra, her catalogue ranges from pieces for prepared piano and chamber ensembles to choral music and scores for radio drama and film; she has also written a chamber opera (*UR\_*) to her own libretto. This May, the intrepid flutist Claire Chase will debut a major

new work for solo flutes, two cellos, and piano at Carnegie Hall.

The DSQ previously collaborated with Thorvaldsdottir to perform her string octet *Illumine* (2017), which explores “the notion of dawn and the relationship between light and darkness—in particular the ignition of the first beams of light and the subtle rhythms that appear through the pulsating dance of light emerging,” as she explains. Thorvaldsdottir, who herself plays cello, was eager to take on the *Doppelgänger* commission to explore the possibilities available within the sound world of four solo strings.

Thorvaldsdottir’s compositions often invite comparisons with natural landscapes (in particular, the bracing, volcanic beauty of Iceland). An otherworldly quality has been attributed to Thorvaldsdottir’s music: if “otherworldly” is understood to embrace not only a time-transcending beauty but its shadow as well, and the sense of an unidentified foreboding that lurks beyond the horizon as well—an ambivalence that, come to think of it, is quintessentially Schubertian.

In *Rituals*, which is cast in 11 interlinked sections (two of them titled “Ascension,” the rest using abstract roman numerals), Thorvaldsdottir fragments textural sonorities in a manner that can be compared with ritualistic behavior. Repetition and ritual, she notes, can be found “in everything: in breath, and in the way we do everything.” She describes her process in this piece as “repeating materials in different ways so that they are sometimes unrecognizable; sometimes you might recognize some elements and not others. The core is going into all these little things that are so different, yet are all the same.”

Thorvaldsdottir also refers to her music as “an ecosystem of materials that are carried from one performer—or performers—to the next throughout the process of the work. ... All materials continuously grow in and out of each other, growing and transforming throughout the process.” A pitch that is sustained for a long time, for example, should be

approached as “a fragile flower that you need to carry in your hands and walk the distance on a thin rope without dropping it or falling. It is a way of measuring time and noticing the tiny changes that happen as you walk further along the same thin rope.”

Thorvaldsdottir writes that her music in general emerges not from “a verbal place” but “as a stream of consciousness that flows, is felt, sensed, shaped, and then crafted.” Once a piece is completed, she often seeks how to articulate “some of the important elements of the musical ideas or thoughts that play certain key roles in the origin of the piece.” According to Rand Steiger, who became one of the composer’s mentors at the University of California, San Diego (where she obtained her doctorate), “her internal process is completely about sound,” bypassing the realm of verbal language.

But with *Rituals*, Thorvaldsdottir realized that her commentary “needed to be left impressionistic and unfiltered.” It reads as follows:

*repetition in atmosphere—going through motions, the same motions, but it is never the same—with every repeating breath is a new feeling, new vision, new life, new being, same life—the same but always different—various perspectives of ritualistic feelings, sensations, explorations, from the hymn-like Ascension to obsessive percussive materials... from parts that move like a rigorous engine to others of flowing atmospheric ether—but all have in common the ritualistic approach to the material—rituals in lyricism—rituals in hope—rituals in repetition—rituals in song—rituals in material—rituals in prayer—rituals in obsession—rituals in life—rituals in being—rituals in harmonies—bending rituals—rituals in difference—ritual as an escape—ritual as peace—ritual as continuation—ritual as burden—ritual as hope—ritual as obsession—ritual as being—ritual in harmony—each part is its own ritual and together the 11 parts form one ritual*

—Thomas May



The **Danish String Quartet** celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2022–23, and the Grammy-nominated quartet continues to assert its preeminence among the world's finest string quartets. Formed when its members were in their teens, the group is renowned for impeccable musicianship, sophisticated artistry, exquisite clarity of ensemble, and, above all, and an unmatched ability to play as one. Performances are characterized by a rare musical spontaneity, and the players exude a palpable joy in music-making that has made the group one of today's most highly acclaimed and in-demand classical quartets, performing sold-out concert halls around the world.

This season, the Danish String Quartet continues its Doppelgänger Project, an ambitious four-year international commissioning project that pairs world premieres with late major chamber works by Schubert. This season's new work, by Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, premiered earlier this month. The Doppelgänger Project is commissioned by the Danish String Quartet with the support of Cal Performances, Carnegie Hall, UC Santa Barbara Arts & Lectures, the Vancouver Re-

cital Society, Flagey in Brussels, and Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam. The Danish Quartet performs 28 concerts in North American this season over the course of three separate tours and is Artist in Residence at London's Wigmore Hall.

The Danish String Quartet's most recent recording project is *PRISM*, a series of five discs on ECM New Series that explores the symbiotic musical and contextual relationships between Bach fugues, Beethoven string quartets, and works by later composers. The most recent release is *PRISM IV* (2022), which was an "Editor's Choice" in *Limelight* magazine. Slated for release on ECM in 2023 are a disc of traditional Scandinavian folk music and *PRISM V*.

The Danish Quartet was named *Musical America's* 2020 Ensemble of the Year; awarded the Borletti-Buitoni Trust in 2016; named BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists in 2013; appointed to the Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two); and received the Carl Nielsen Prize, Denmark's highest cultural honor.

[www.danishquartet.com](http://www.danishquartet.com).