

OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN, GAILLIMH
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY

Text of the Introductory Address delivered by **MARY DOOLEY**, National University of Ireland, Galway on 10 June, 2016 on the occasion of the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Music *honoris causa*, on **CONTEMPO QUARTET** (*Ingrid Nicola, Andreea Banciu, Adrian Mantu and Bogdan Sofei*).

A Uachtaráin, a Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle....

Galway's ConTempo Quartet is widely recognised as one of the most vibrant chamber ensembles performing today. What makes them so special is the joy they bring to their audiences and the energy, passion, skill and sheer commitment they invest in their performance of Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn and so many others.

The members of ConTempo are Ingrid Nicola, Andreea Banciu, Adrian Mantu and Bogdan Sofei. They were all born and grew up in Bucharest, Romania and formed the ConTempo Quartet in 1995 while still at university. They chose the name ConTempo to reflect both the 'life and spirit' of music and its contemporary interpretation.

For Romania, the first half of the 20th century was a 'golden age' when the arts. Of course, Romania was then a constitutional monarchy and a cultured society with a wealth of oil and other resources.

Unfortunately, at the start of the Second World War, the country was annexed by Germany, later occupied by the USSR until the late 1950s and was then ruled by its own communist dictators until 1989. These unwelcome developments eventually led to economic collapse and numerous social problems. In the 1980s, when ConTempo's members were still just children, the austerity policies of Nicolae Ceausescu

brought rationing, reduced living standards, increased malnutrition and infant mortality and aggravated the already dire economic situation.

The revolution of 1989, and Ceausescu's trial and execution for crimes of genocide and abuse of power, finally ended half a century of repression. This all happened while ConTempo's members were in secondary school. Romania today is a different country, a member of NATO since 2004 and of the European Union since 2007.

One can only imagine the horrors of the communist era and how parents struggled to shield their children from the worst of it. The response of ConTempo's parents was to encourage their children to love music. Our emotional and intellectual response to great music is food for our souls and their abiding and shared love of music helped them to deal with the extremes of a very difficult situation.

Today ConTempo's own children, Elsa and Karina, Clara and Sophia play viola, piano and cello. Some of ConTempo's parents and children are here today and I offer them a special word of thanks for sharing these wonderful musicians with us.

All four members of ConTempo attended the George Enescu High School of Music in Bucharest. Only musically talented pupils were accepted although tuition was provided in all the usual school subjects. They went on to study at the National University of Music Bucharest which had been established in 1863 as a Conservatory, later became a Royal Academy and ultimately a National University.

After university, ConTempo accepted a number of sought after fellowships in Canada, London and Madrid. At the Royal Academy of Music in London, they taught undergraduate and postgraduate students and, under Siegmund Nissel, completed their research on Beethoven's String Quartets. It was here too that they met their great mentors, the Amadeus String Quartet.

Around that time, Sally Coyle and Jane O'Leary were establishing the Galway Music Residency as a comprehensive music development programme for Galway. Local and national organisations collaborated to support this important initiative. Sponsors included Galway University Foundation, NUI Galway, the Arts Council, TG4 and Galway City and County Councils. ConTempo won the international competition to become the Galway Ensemble-in-Residence and in 2003 came to live and work here.

Thankfully they have settled in Galway and continue to enrich our cultural life and our appreciation of music generally through their wonderful performances, collaborations and outreach work.

ConTempo is also really important to us because, in so many ways, it represents the embodiment of Galway's enduring ambition to greatly enhance services and facilities for music education and performance. In addition to its excellent concert

programme, ConTempo's work includes education programmes at primary, secondary and third level, workshops, lectures, summer schools and collaborations with numerous music organisations and schools of music in the city and county. Much has been achieved to date but so much more still needs to be done for music in Galway.

ConTempo became RTE's Quartet in Residence in 2014. Their significant achievement is also an endorsement of the wonderful work of The Galway Music Residency, its generous sponsors and in particular, the power of collaboration.

Over the past 20 years, ConTempo has delivered magnificent performances around the world, won many prestigious prizes and collaborated with artists of the highest calibre. Their international film, television and radio work includes projects with Bob Quinn and Steven Spielberg. Their collaborations across diverse music genres include projects with

contemporary music composer Jane O'Leary and traditional musician Máirtín O'Connor.

ConTempo was inspired by wonderful parents, teachers, and fellow musicians. They told me that they worked very hard but really felt that they were also just very lucky. I believe that they are just very talented and that we are the lucky ones!

Philip Hammond summed it up beautifully when he described ConTempo's style as 'emotional, unbounded and vibrant' and their performance as 'holding nothing back, exhilarating with a real immediacy in their bright, exaggerated, extrovert music making which is as unusual and as refreshing as it is pleasurable'.

What a wonderful recipe for success – together we can build on it!

PRAEHONORABILES CANCELLARIE ET VICE-CANCELLARIE,
TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hasce meas filias filiosque meos, quos omnes scio
tam moribus quam doctrina habiles et idoneos esse qui admittantur,
honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Musica, idque tibi fide mea
testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.