



## Death and the Maiden: the new album by Kuss Quartet

The Kuss Quartet, known for their sophisticated musical programmes, well-thought-out concept albums, and exciting connections between past and present, have just released a brand-new album. The starting point is Schubert's string quartet "Death and the Maiden". The existential confrontation of life and death, crisis and hope, continues into the present day with works by Iris ter Schiphorst and Mark Andre, as well as a thrilling collaboration between the Kuss Quartet and recorder player Maurice Steger, creating music that touches the edge of silence.



**Iris ter Schiphorst (\*1956)**

[1] SEI GUTES MUTS

**Mark Andre (\*1964)**

7 PIECES FOR STRING QUARTET

[2] I

[3] II.

[4] III.

[5] IV.

[6] V.

[7] VI.

[8] VII.

**Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)**

STRING QUARTET NO.14 IN D MINOR D.810 'DEATH AND THE MAIDEN'

[9] I. Allegro

[10] II. Andante con moto

[11] III. Scherzo: Allegro molto

[12] IV. Presto

**Kuss Quartet // Rubicon Classics // RCD1102**

**Released: 29 November 2024**

*"It's important for us to play contemporary music. We're interested in finding new ways to express ourselves while being authentic and relevant to modern life,"* says Mikayel Hakhnazaryan, cellist of the Kuss Quartet.

The Kuss Quartet received high praise for their latest album "Krise" (Crisis), which featured works composed over the last 250 years: "An incredibly powerful, moving and emotionally stirring listening experience," according to *The Strad* reviewer.

Anyone who has ever experienced the Kuss Quartet knows that their programmes - whether live or recorded - reach the core of the music. The quartet's goal is to give listeners new experiences. Jana Kuss, Oliver Wille, William Coleman and Mikayel Hakhnazaryan never perform at surface-level. Whether they play classical, romantic, or contemporary repertoire, they are shaped by the desire to go deeper and express the very essence of the music. .

*"As a quartet, you have to create a 'super brain' - four people who together create something that is greater than the sum of their parts. Each player has a creative space on stage, a personal space that can expand and in which they can meet the others,"* says William Coleman, the ensemble's violist.

The members of the Kuss Quartet also made use of this creative freedom in Schubert's penultimate string quartet "Death and the Maiden". Dreadful life circumstances formed the background for the work, which was written in 1824 after Schubert had contracted syphilis and the hoped-for breakthrough as a composer did not materialize. "I feel like the most unhappy, miserable person in the world," wrote Schubert in a letter dated March 31, 1824. In the prominent second movement of his string quartet no. 14, Schubert varied the Matthias Claudius song "Death and the Maiden" D 531, which he had already set to music in 1817, and quoted the verses of death from it.

Exploring themes such as mortality and fate, the string quartet can be seen as a metaphor for the struggle for personal autonomy - a struggle that is more relevant today than ever. It addresses the tension between external control and individual agency, with death representing external forces threatening the maiden's choices and the silencing of that voice.

*"The DNA of the piece, and each variation of this second movement should be contained in the theme of the second movement. There is an emotional logic and development throughout the journey of the variations, and each quartet member must play with a sense of communal inner resonance that evokes Schubert's sense of emotional ambivalence, like an actor inhabiting a role."*, says William Coleman in the Masterclass section of the current issue of *The Strad*.

The German-Dutch composer Iris ter Schiphorst also takes up Matthias Claudius' text in her 2021 work "Sei gutes Muts" for the Kuss Quartet and the recorder player Maurice Steger. She lets the musicians voice fragments from it, whispering them, which has an effect of great intensity. *"The extraordinary piece by Iris ter Schiphorst, which we play with the fantastic recorder player Maurice Steger, drifts, flirts, hovers between life and death, between crisis and hope,"* says Jana Kuss (1<sup>st</sup> violin). *"The recorder is normally a light, charming, virtuosic instrument. Here it is suddenly the voice of death, screaming, going far beyond its normal limits."* Maurice Steger surprises listeners with extended playing techniques such as overblowing, tongue frullato, and air noises.

The German-French composer Mark Andre also dedicated his "Seven Pieces for String Quartet" to the Kuss Quartet in 2022. The seven miniatures move on the edge of silence, fading away before revealing themselves anew as "unfolded, compositional disappearance" in Mark Andre's words. The Kuss Quartet connects these moving studies in silence to Schubert's string quartet and consistently continues the impending silence in Andre's work.

Oliver Wille, 2<sup>nd</sup> violin, summarises: *"For us, the album is a compelling sequel to the albums 'Berlin.Freizeit' from the Covid-period, and 'Krise' (Crisis) about the looming catastrophes of our time. We must react to Schubert's outcry, Ter Schiphorst's refugee drama and Mark Andre's fragile silence and disappearance of the world with our art. 'Sei gutes Muts!' Have courage!"*

Over the past ten years, the Kuss Quartet has repeatedly commissioned new works and enriched the string quartet repertoire with new compositions by such composers as Birke Bertelsmeier, Sara Glojnaric, Enno Poppe, Aribert Reimann, Manfred Trojahn, Bruno Mantovani and Johannes Fischer.



 YouTube

„Sei gutes Muts“ - Iris ter Shiphorst, 2021  
Kuss Quartett & Maurice Steger  
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