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## **A “virtual” Coffee Concert recorded at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford**

**Available from Sunday October 11, 2020 at 11:15**

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the Oxford Coffee Concerts or make a donation to help support our exciting  
“virtual” concert project, please get in touch with us via the contact page at  
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This is the first of four virtual Coffee Concerts recorded in late September which will be  
streamed from our YouTube channel at 11:15 on Sunday mornings over the next month.  
(They will also be available for a limited time after release.)

### **The Carducci String Quartet**

- **Haydn: String Quartet in D major, op 20 no 4**
- **Mendelssohn: String Quartet no 6 in F minor, op 80**

Matthew Denton (violin)  
Michelle Fleming (violin)  
Eoin Schmidt-Martin (viola)  
Emma Denton (cello)

An internationally renowned Anglo-Irish string quartet based in the UK, the versatile and award-winning Carducci String Quartet have performed everything from brand new quartets, classic works by Haydn, complete Shostakovich cycles, and even partnered with folk-rock icon Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull. Founded in 1997, the ensemble have won numerous international competitions, including Concert Artists Guild International Competition USA 2007 and First Prize at Finland’s Kuhmo International Chamber Music Competition 2004. In 2016, they took home a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for their performances of cycles of the complete Shostakovich Quartets. This Shostakovich15 project was accompanied by a recording of quartets 4, 8 and 11 for Signum

Classics, to which the quartet added a further volume in spring 2019 (1,2 and 7) acclaimed by Gramophone Magazine for its “...athletic, upfront performances, clear in texture, forthright in tone and bold in articulation.” The quartet have released a bevy of acclaimed recordings on their own label, Carducci Classics, as well as Signum Classics, and their Naxos recordings of Philip Glass Quartets have had over six million plays on Spotify.

Described by The Strad as presenting “a masterclass in unanimity of musical purpose, in which severity could melt seamlessly into charm, and drama into geniality”, the Carducci Quartet are recognised as one of today’s most successful string quartets. Performing over 90 concerts worldwide each year, the quartet also run an annual Carducci festival in Highnam, Gloucester and are quartet in residence at Dean Close in Cheltenham, where they teach young string players and coach chamber music.

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The Carducci Quartet appear at prestigious venues across the globe including the Wigmore Hall, London; National Concert Hall, Dublin; Tivoli Concert Hall, Copenhagen; The Frick Collection and Carnegie Hall, New York; Library of Congress and John F Kennedy Center, Washington DC; St Lawrence Center for the Arts, Toronto; and Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. Festival residencies include Cheltenham, Ryedale, Lichfield, Presteigne, Kilkenny, Snape Proms, and West Cork.

In a year blighted by the Covid-19 they planned in 2020 to celebrate Beethoven's 250th anniversary with various immersive projects, including a weekend of concerts at London's Barbican Centre. This season was also to include a return to LSO St Luke's, tours to Spain and Germany, and chamber music projects with clarinettists Julian Bliss and Emma Johnson, pianists Martin Roscoe and Kate Whitley, oud player Joseph Tawadros, and the Navarra Quartet.

Highly celebrated for their interpretation of contemporary repertoire, the Carducci Quartet have curated many diverse projects and are regularly invited to perform new works. Recent and upcoming premieres include works by Simon Rowland-Jones, Gavin Higgins, Karl Jenkins, Jonny Greenwood and Kate Whitley. In 2015 they curated projects around Philip Glass and Steve Reich as part of the Royal Philharmonic Society Award winning "Minimalism Unwrapped" at Kings Place in London.

Education is an important element of the Carducci Quartet's work, earning them a place on the Royal Philharmonic Society Award shortlist for their family concert "Getting the Quartet Bug!". The Carducci Music Trust was set up to support their work in schools and with young musicians. They are also Carne Trust Ensemble in Residence at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London and perform a number of school concerts each year supported by the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust.

## **String Quartet in D major, op 20 no 4**

**by Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)**

**1. Allegro di molto; 2. Un poco adagio e affettuoso;  
3. Menuetto. Allegretto alla Zingarese; 4. Presto e scherzando.**

Haydn's Op 20 string quartets are sometimes collectively known as the 'Sun' Quartets, from the engraving which illustrates the title page of an edition published in 1779. Dating from 1772, they mark the culmination of a five-year period, during which Haydn also wrote his Op 9 and Op 17 quartets, in which his quartet style reached, very nearly, its full maturity. It was to be nine years before he returned to the medium in the six quartets of Op 33, but the elements of the "new and special manner" in which he claimed they were written are all in place in Op 20, to be refined and polished in later works, but not substantially altered.

Some scholars go so far as to claim that Op 20 not only marks the first maturity of Haydn's quartet style but also establishes the Viennese classical style itself.

The Op 20 set also comes at the end of the period in which Haydn produced some of his most turbulent music, notably that extraordinary series of stormy, minor-key symphonies he composed between 1768 and 1772. They are generally known as his 'Sturm und Drang' (Storm and Stress) symphonies, from the title of a contemporary play, which became applied to movements, particularly in

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German literature, marked by considerable expressive intensity.

The emotional range of Op 20 as a whole is remarkably wide, including not just one minor-key work, as in Haydn's other sets of quartets, but two. Structurally, Haydn is working on a larger scale than before, and there is a new emphasis on interweaving contrapuntal lines. Finales take on a new importance in their own right, balancing the first and the slow movements; three of the quartets – Nos 2, 5 and 6 – end with imposing fugal movements. All four instruments play a more or less equal part in the dialogue. In particular, the cello is freed to take on a more openly melodic role than had been the case in the earlier sets.

No 4 reflects something of the range of the Op 20 quartets as a whole. The opening movement is a serious, often darkly coloured piece, with a subdued but purposeful opening. As the music progresses it occasionally passes through the kind of emotionally charged harmonic progressions

which would not sound out of place in some of Brahms's later music.

The seriousness intensifies in the set of variations which follows. The spotlight passes, in turn, to the second violin and viola in variation 1, the cello in variation 2, and the first violin, delicately fluttering over the sparsely scored lower parts, in variation 3. The fourth and last variation begins as an almost literal repeat of the theme but is extended to form a powerful and moving coda.

The mood changes completely for the last two movements, which are in Haydn's most high-spirited vein. The allegretto "in the gypsy style" might call itself a minuet, but any hint of aristocratic elegance is thrown to the winds in a riot of cross-accented and syncopated rhythms. The trio section, with its prominent cello part, offers an interlude of relative decorum.

The finale is, if anything, still more exuberant, with the conversation flying off at absurd tangents or punctuated by sudden, disruptive silences. The poker-faced final cadence is absolutely priceless.

## **String Quartet in F minor, Op 80 by Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)**

**1. Allegro assai - presto; 2. Allegro assai; 3. Adagio; 4. Finale. Allegro molto.**

In May 1847 Mendelssohn returned to Germany from his last visit to England. Passing through Frankfurt on his way home he received the shattering news of his beloved sister Fanny's sudden death. The shock, added to his own precarious state of health, left him for a while completely unable to compose. A holiday in Switzerland partly restored his well-being, and he set to work on the F minor String Quartet, which was to be his last major composition. The piece is a great welling-up of all the turbulent, stormy

emotions which occasionally show through the urbane exterior of his music. This is perhaps the least familiar side of his musical character. There are plenty of other examples in his work (the aria "Is not His Word like a fire?" from Elijah, for one), but none of them quite prepares us for the sustained, bitter intensity of this quartet.

We know where we are, emotionally, from the very first bar. The agitated tremolandos which propel the opening theme so forcefully are

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actually quite sparingly used, but they set the tone for the whole movement. In such a context the lyrical relaxation afforded by the second main theme seems so fleeting as to be illusory. In the end the emotional pressure builds up to such an extent that an increase of speed to presto in the coda is needed to contain it.

The turbulence spills over into the scherzo. Quite unlike Mendelssohn's usual light, airy way with scherzo movements, this is positively savage in its relentless, syncopated energy. With the adagio comes a degree of relief, but only to begin with. The main theme is in Mendelssohn's typically suave melodic vein, but off-beat accompanying chords keep

nudging it forward towards a tense, dissonant climax.

The agitation of the first two movements breaks out with renewed force in the finale. The main theme, like that of the second movement, is propelled by its syncopated rhythm. At the recapitulation – the climactic point when the movement's opening music returns - triplet figures begin to take over the texture, like the tarantella rhythm that Mendelssohn had used so often before, but to very different effect; here it suggests grim energy rather than high spirits. The final impression is of tragedy, not so much overcome, as met head-on with stoic determination.

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### **Coming soon – More virtual concerts**

Released on Sunday October 18, our next virtual Coffee Concert features Ben Gilmore (violin) and Katya Apekisheva (piano) playing Mozart, Clara Schumann and Schubert.

That's followed on October 25 by the Piatti String Quartet playing Beethoven, Webern and Bridge. More details on our website at [www.coffeeconcerts.com](http://www.coffeeconcerts.com).