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

Sunday January 31, 2021 at 11:15

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Virtual Coffee Concerts are pre-recorded at the Holywell Music Room in Oxford and can
be streamed from our YouTube channel at 11:15 on Sunday mornings. (These recordings
are available for a limited time after release but, of course, there will be more to come.)

The Carducci String Quartet

- **Haydn: String Quartet in B flat major, op 76 no 4 (“Sunrise”)**
- **Glass: String Quartet no 3 (“Mishima”)**
- **Shostakovich String Quartet no 7 in F sharp minor, op 108**

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.

Continued from Page 1

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 clarinetists 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.

performed works by distinguished composers including Harrison Birtwistle and Huw Watkins. They gave the first performance of *Holkham Beach*, a piece written for and dedicated to them by Simon Rowland-Jones. Their recording of the complete piano trios by David Matthews, for *Toccata Classics*, was hailed by the composer as "definitive". As part of their commitment to education and outreach, the trio commissioned a narrated work for young audiences from Rachel Leach, based on the book by Steven Isserlis "Why Beethoven Threw the Stew". It has proved to be an entertaining introduction to the music of Beethoven and the power of chamber music for all ages.

More information:

<https://www.leonorepianotrio.com/>

String Quartet in B flat major, op 76 no 4 (“Sunrise”) by Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

1. Allegro con spirito; 2. Adagio; 3. Menuetto. Allegro; 4. Allegro ma non troppo.

The six works that make up Haydn’s Op 76, and the two of Op 77, are the rich final harvest of his long experience with the string quartet. Over the preceding forty years or so he had developed it from the lightweight divertimento style of its origins in the late 1750s into one of the most important of all instrumental genres. There is no sense, though, of him consciously looking back or summing up his achievements, but of expanding and developing still further his approaches to structure, melody, harmony and texture.

Op 76 was composed between 1796 and 1797, commissioned by Count Joseph Erdödy, a member of an aristocratic Viennese family with keen musical interests, but whose precise relationship to Haydn is unclear. Although they were written, like most of Haydn’s quartets, for small gatherings of connoisseurs, he had recently returned from his second visit to London, with the novel experience of hearing his quartets played to large paying concert audiences, and this leaves its mark on much of his writing in these last works.

Op 76 No 4 takes its nineteenth-century English nick-name from the opening theme which soars through an octave and a half on the first violin over a sustained chord on the lower instruments. The second main theme is almost its mirror-image, descending through an even wider compass on the cello. The bustling figuration that links them provides the necessary element of contrast. The relaxed

tone of the two main themes, though, is deceptive. It is the more energetic material which makes up a large part of the fabric of the development section, spending much of its time moving through a number of minor keys.

The second movement, a particularly slow one for Haydn, builds its simple five-note opening phrase into a meditation of profound stillness. This is one of those movements in Haydn’s music in which we can hear the early stirrings of the romantic style that was to blossom in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Another comes in the minuet, which is vigorous with a touch of peasant earthiness. In fact, it comes in the central trio section, which abandons eighteenth-century courtliness for something more mysterious, as though the salon windows have been thrown open, allowing a breeze to blow in from the vast landscape outside. The folk-like drone bass, off-beat accents and modal melodic inflections suggest Haydn consciously imitating the sound of a hurdy-gurdy.

The genial last movement begins at a fairly steady tempo which continues through the minor-key central section and the return to the major key and the music of the opening. Then Haydn springs one of his surprises in a lengthy coda. The music gets faster, then faster still, as it races towards its exuberant conclusion – one of those passages where his experience of the large London audiences shows through.

String Quartet no 3 (“Mishima”) by Philip Glass (born 1937)

**1. 1957: Award Montage; 2. November 25 – Ichigaya; 3. Grandmother and Kimitake;
4 1963: Body Building; 5. Blood Oath; 6. Mishima/Closing.**

Besides three student works, which he withdrew, Glass has to date composed eight string quartets. The first was written in 1966, soon after he finished his studies with the great teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris, though it received its first performance only in 1986. The next four were composed between 1983 and 1991; Nos 6, 7 and 8 followed in 2013, 2014 and 2018.

String Quartet No 3 dates from 1985 and is based on parts of the score Glass composed for the film *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*. Directed by Paul Schrader, the film is a fictionalised account of the life of Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima (1925-1970), who committed suicide after his personal campaign to bring ancient samurai values back to Japanese society ended in failure. The music for the flashback scenes of his childhood, shot in black and white, were scored for string quartet, and Glass says that he always intended these portions of the score to take on an independent existence as a concert work.

The steady, moderately-paced '1957: Award Montage', with its wave-like motion, is the

longest of the six movements; the quiet and meditative 'November 25 – Ichigaya' is the shortest. 'Grandmother and Kimitake' opens with a series of strident chords, before settling into intricate rhythmic patterns of three- and two-note groups. Eventually the music gets steadily quieter, before coming to rest.

'1963: Body Building' begins with a quiet, slow ascent, starting low on the viola and cello, and building, via patterns of repeated notes, to an abrupt cut-off. The juxtaposition of notes grouped in twos and in threes, which we heard in the third movement takes a different form in the opening section of 'Blood Oath'. The music is written in a three-beat metre, but sounds as though it is in two, and somehow the players need to convey both these rhythmic patterns simultaneously. The middle section reverts to the repeated-note figures of the previous movement, before recalling the start. Like the fourth movement, this one suddenly stops in mid-air. Finally, 'Mishima/Closing' looks back at both the wave-motion of the first movement, and the repeated notes of the fourth, before the music winds down, bringing the quartet to an open-ended conclusion.

String Quartet no 7 in F sharp minor, op 108 by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

1. Allegretto – 2. Lento – 3. Allegro – allegretto.

During the latter half of his career, Shostakovich became increasingly absorbed in the world of chamber music. When the Seventh Quartet was completed, in 1960, there were only four more symphonies still to

come. Shortly after the first performance of the Seventh Quartet, he revealed his intention, which he had no doubt had in mind for some time, of completing a cycle of twenty-four quartets, one in each of the major and minor

Continued from Page 4

keys, but in the end he completed only a further eight.

The Seventh Quartet is dedicated to the memory of his first wife, Nina, who died in 1954, and who would have been fifty in 1959, the year it was begun. It is much the shortest of his quartets, and its terse, cryptic style would become increasingly typical of his later work as a whole. The overall structure is uncomplicated: three movements played without a break and each falling into clearly defined sections. But the music's essential simplicity acts as a mask for complex emotions below the surface.

The first violin launches the quartet with a rapid falling phrase, landing on a three-note rhythmic figure which is seized on obsessively by all four players. Although there is no actual change of tempo, the pace of the music quickens for the cello's edgily racing second theme. The first group of material turns into a rather forlorn and enigmatic pizzicato waltz,

followed by the cello theme. The final wind-down is nudged forward by the edgy three-note figure from the start. Not the opening theme itself, notice – Shostakovich is keeping that in reserve for the end of the last movement.

An undulating semiquaver figure provides the backdrop for the *lento*'s waif-like main theme, high on the first violin and then the cello. The middle section moves the opposite way, from viola and cello in octaves and in their lowest register, back to first violin.

After a brusque short introduction, the finale breaks out into a savagely energetic fugue, which positively invites the players to roughen their tone. Once this has run its course, the music resumes its ironic, detached mask with a more considered version of the fugue theme. This then slips unobtrusively into the waltz version of the first movement's main theme. It is this which has the quartet's inscrutable last word.

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