

DANTE QUARTET

Featuring Zoe Beyers, Ian Watson, Carol Ella & Richard Jenkinson

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Albert Combrink takes us *Inside the Concert* with notes on the programme

The String Quartet is a configuration of four stringed instruments, each with its own range, that at once fascinates, challenges, and terrifies any composer. A litmus test, a trial by fire, and a calling card of virtually every composer who ever put pen to paper, the string quartet remains the ultimate composer's challenge. Mirroring the four human voice-types found in choral work – Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass, it contains the basic building blocks for any composer to write in any style or genre, and yet it remains one of the greatest challenges.

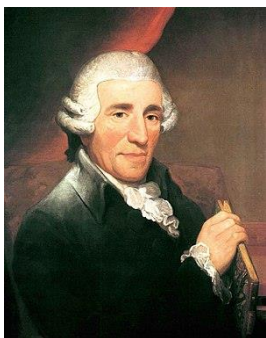
On this programme we find a set of composers, each who made a unique contribution to the genre, but each also represents their own unique relationship with the environment in which they find themselves: be it the exploration of a building, or the death of a loved one or an economic crisis that downscaled a Prince's orchestra to a 4-piece band.

The challenge in Quartet playing is also unique for string players: blending of sound and intonation in an orchestra is easier where vibrato can help one sneak in underneath a blanket of other players, but the String Quartet demands the excellence of four soloists, one lone player per part, but who can also blend into one unit with only one heart beating between them.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in B Flat Minor "Sunrise" Op.76 No.4 (1797)

1. *Allegro con Spirito (lively with spirit)* 2. *Adagio (slow)* 3. *Menuet. Allegro (lively dance)*
4. *Finale. Allegro ma non troppo (lively but not overly so)*



From approximately 1759 to 1799, Haydn composed 78 string quartets over a period of forty years of which at least 30 are celebrated as masterworks of the form.

Joseph Haydn was easing into a happy and comfortable retirement in the years 1796-97, when his 6 String Quartets Op.76 were written. After his second tour of England, he returned to Vienna a wealthy man. The new Esterházy Prince Nikolaus II had just inherited his father's palace at Esterházy, but had no interest in a full-time orchestra nor a composer. The economy was struggling, and Nikolaus sacked the entire establishment, but kept Haydn on the books to write a Mass for the Princess's name day. He had lots of free time and could accept other commissions.

One particularly well-paid commission came from Count Joseph Erdödy, the Hungarian Court Chancellor. Erdödy had a strong musical education growing in a household where his father employed a fulltime orchestra to play at the family's three palaces. However, on inheriting the title in 1789, he responded to popular taste (and the need for financial stringency) to replace this orchestra with a String Quartet. Naturally this quartet needed music to play, and Haydn was commissioned – very generously for the time – to write six quartets. The resulting 'Erdödy' quartets are great works, perhaps the pinnacle of Haydn's career as a quartet-composer.

The personal stamp that Haydn put on these works, laid the foundation and inspiration for his young student, Ludwig von Beethoven who would begin writing his first quartet after hearing this work. The new level of seriousness in musical expression was a surprise to audiences who perhaps expected a little more *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, which was the rage at the time. This was clearly not background music. The works became more 'symphonic' in design, with longer development sections where ideas were developed and churned into complex structures.

1. The English nickname “Sunrise” stems from the opening motif: the sustained soft glow of a single chord gives birth to a solo violin tracing the sun’s rays upwards. The light grows in brightness until the full blaze of daylight allows a spirited and constant development of the materials presented in the opening.
2. A rapt meditation unfolds in E Flat Major, (a warm key for strings). It combines a sense of the sacred with the improvisatory feeling already tasted at the opening of the work. Despite being quite a strict Sonata-form, it gives the impression of a free-flowing Fantasia. This would become the model for Schubert Adagios.
3. French Courtly Dance as anticipated by the title, is replaced with a robust German Village Dance. A fast-paced minuet evokes Hungarian or Balkan folk music, with a folk-dance feeling dominating the movement. A Hurdy-Gurdy (perhaps a hint at the drone of the French Musette) and a village fiddler (in octave doublings) joins the dance-party in the middle section.
4. The finale opens with what could be a charming English folk-song learnt on one of his recent trips to London. This Rondo-theme will repeat, but Haydn’s genius as an improviser is clear as the theme is never repeated verbatim, but constantly tweaked, embellished, extended and enjoyed. Haydn gives the impression of acceleration by changing the figuration of the writing. It gives the appearance of speeding up by becoming more active, while the tempo remains basically the same.

George Walker (1922-2018)

Lyric for Strings

George Walker, the first black composer to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music, lived a life of “firsts”. On top of this 1996 accolade, he was one of the first black graduates of the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia in 1945, the first black musician to play New York’s Town Hall in 1945, the first black recipient of a doctorate from the Eastman School in 1955 and the first black tenured faculty member at Smith College in 1961.



After graduating from high school at 14, a young George Walker attended Oberlin University with the idea of becoming a concert pianist. He made his recital debut at Town Hall in New York City in 1945, and just two weeks later, played Rachmaninov’s Third Piano Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy. But he began writing music while at Curtis, where he studied piano with Rudolf Serkin, fearing, and eventually confirming, that as an African American, he would have a hard time getting engagements. He left for Paris for further piano studies, and he ended up almost by accident in the composition class of the most famous teacher in the 20th Century, Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger was allegedly so impressed with Walker’s musicianship that she made him exempt of her usual student requirements, telling him he could bring anything he wanted to show her at lessons.

He wrote nearly 100 compositions, from symphonies and concertos to delicate song cycles and solo piano works

Lyric for Strings is written in the American Elegiac tradition. Originally titled “Lament”, it was intended as the second movement of his first String Quartet of 1946. The elements of a traditional elegy mirror three stages of loss. First, there is a lament, where the speaker expresses grief and sorrow, then praise and admiration of the idealized dead, and finally consolation and solace. The American “Elegy” attempts a synthesis of these elements, with notable examples by Stravinsky, Ives, Stephen Albert, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland and of course, his Curtis Institute Classmate, Samuel Barber, whose famous *Adagio for Strings* defines this style.

Like many of his works, *Lyric for Strings* reflects his affinity for indigenous American music. "There's no way I can conceal my identity as a black composer," he said in a 1982 interview with the New York

Times. "I have a very strong feeling for the Negro spiritual and have also drawn from American folk songs, and popular and patriotic tunes, which I believe merit inclusion in serious compositions."

The work is dedicated to Walker's grandmother, Melvina King, a formerly enslaved person, who died shortly before its completion.

Caroline Shaw (1982)

Plan and Elevation: The Grounds of Dumbarton Oakes (2015) for String Quartet

- I The Ellipse
- II The Cutting Garden
- III The Herbaceous Border
- IV The Orangery
- V The Beech Tree



Caroline Shaw is a singer, violinist and composer, who works in a wide variety of styles and genres, from classical string quartets to pop music and rap. Her collaborations include Kanye West, Sara Bareilles, the Duke Quartet, Dawn Upshaw and Renée Fleming. She is the youngest ever winner of a Pulitzer Prize for Composition, and has also won a Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition.

Aside from vocal music, the String Quartet is the medium she is most prolific in. Shaw describes her regular return to the medium as 'ritualistic, saying "It is familiar, the 4 voices outlining so much of what we learn as a standard harmonic language, but it opens new doors and leads to new rabbit holes. One simple change of a bass line can affect the whole world of the piece, or create an entirely new one."

The process from the known to the unknown inspires all her works.

Shaw was an Inaugural Fellow at Dumbarton Oakes and this experiences led to the creation of "Plan and Elevation: The Grounds of Dumbarton Oakes" in 2015. Dumbarton Oakes is a cultural centre conceived as a "Home of the Humanities" and is run by Harvard as a centre of research, creation and artistic projects in the form of a library, a research institute, a museum and a historical garden. It was created by Robert and Mildred Bliss who were collectors and scholars of Byzantine and Pre-Columbian art. The garden was developed by Beatrix Ferrandi.

Shaw likes to draw architecture when travelling, and uses these sketches as meditations on space and proportion, and sometimes the lessons she learns there, spills over into her music. "Plan and Elevation" is no exception. 'Plan' refers to the orthographic, bird's eye view of a space or building, and 'Elevation' is the side view, which fleshes out details of appearance, decoration and style. For Shaw, this binary is a gentle metaphor for one's path in any endeavour: the actual journey or results might be very different from – and more "elevated" than – the original plan.

In this work, Shaw explores her experience of the physical spaces at Dumbarton Oakes, while reflecting on the emotional impact of the experience. Each movement is built on a Ground Bass Line – a short recurring melodic patten in the lower parts of the composition, that recurs often enough to be considered the principal structural element.

1. **The Ellipse** – The work explores the concept of infinite repetition. It describes a meditative experience as one walks around the stone path under the trimmed hornbeams. While this clears the mind, Shaw also quotes the influence of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) whose diverse writings explored the question of what it means to be an existing, finite human being, a concern he associates with "inwardness".

2. **The Cutting Garden** – Shaw uses fun fragmentation of earlier String Quartets by Ravel and Mozart (k.387) as well as some of her own works which reference a variety of flowers, grown for the sole purpose of being “killed” for their beauty when at their most alive and exquisite, to serve as cutting flowers. She writes: “Traces of what came before, stays behind in the ground, nourishing new life, which is partially shaped by the old.”
3. **The Herbaceous Border** – The effect of perspective on one’s view is explored aurally. At the beginning, Shaw uses spare chords to evoke the spare, strict, cold geometry of a French formal garden with tightly controlled borders, viewed from a high vantage point. As the movement progresses the listener/viewer moves gradually down to ground level, where the design is no longer visible, but instead is experienced as the total opposite of order: chaos. A semblance of order appears towards the end when the listeners follows the path, hemmed in by the fragrant herbs in a strictly maintained border.
4. **The Orangery** – Violin passages give the illusion of shimmering and energetic movement, but these are merely fractured shadows in a room with an overgrown, aging fig vine where sun peeks through. The activity is an illusion as the musical structure is static, much as the vine giving the illusion of activity with the play of sun and shadow on the wall.
5. **The Beech Tree** – Ancient sounding Bass Chords, like some ancient lute grows into a depiction of Shaw’s favourite place in the garden, at the tree, “old, strong, simple, ancient elegant and quiet. It was there before me and it will be there after me.”

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 7 in F major, Op. 59, No. 1, 'Razumovsky'

1. Allegro (briskly)
2. Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando (Lively cheerfulness always joking)
3. Adagio molto e mesto (slow and sad)
4. Theme Russes. Allegro (briskly on a Russian theme)



Musicologists divide Beethoven’s creative life into three periods: early, middle and late. The divisions, naturally, are not so clear-cut, but it is difficult to comprehend the experience of an orchestra used to Mozart and Haydn, and the Haydnesque early Beethoven works, to suddenly have the volcanic arrivals, in quick succession, of the musical works that would reshape the music world: *The Eroica Symphony* – the largest number of players ever, the loudest ever with a brass section including a full Horn Quartet, and the longest ever written. The *Appassionata Sonata* Op.57 was so difficult that at first only 4 hand arrangements of it made any sales. It required playing of such ferocity that Beethoven was said to have left the Forte-Piano looking like a Bird’s nest of broken strings. The Chamber Music equivalent of these, is the set of 'Razumovsky' quartets written in 1806.

The so-called “Razumovsky” Quartets were more complex, expansive in scale, and emotionally dramatic than anything previously conceived in the genre. Earlier chamber works were written for the entertainment of aristocratic amateur musicians. With this music, the string quartet moved decisively into the concert hall. Commissioned by Count Andreas Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna, the Op. 59 trilogy was written for one of the first professional string quartets, led by the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh. Razumovsky employed a quartet of string players whose talents allowed Beethoven the opportunity to hear his music played with precision and virtuosity. Just as newly designed piano mechanisms permitted the composer to expand his use of the keyboard, the access to these superb players encouraged Beethoven to make ever-greater demands in his quartet writing.

This radical new music left initial audiences bewildered. According to one review from 1807, “Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven string quartets...are attracting the attention of all connoisseurs. The conception is profound and the construction excellent, but they are not easily comprehended.”

In short, in the Razumovsky Quartets, the entire sonority of the genre had a dramatic change. The four parts are as close to equal in prominence as can be practically possible since the lower voices are simply more resonant. The melodies have a more sustained quality than before and there is a deliberate attempt to produce a “concert” sound, fuller and richer than had been imagined possible before this.

1. A sunny conversation between Cello and Violin over pulsating “travel” music grows into a dramatic, tension filled debate amongst equals. It undeniably shares a *Pastoral* joy with the 6th Symphony of the same Key. Extremely virtuosic passages alternate with chorale-like solemnity before amping up the virtuosity in a triplet gallop to the final F Major full stop.
2. A drumming effect on Cello and Viola so offended the first performers of the quartet that the cellist threw the score on the ground, stomping on it and yelling obscenities at Beethoven. Perhaps he missed the *Sempore Scherzando* marking – “Always joking”. As the movement continues, the jokes get crazier. Rhythmic games obscure all sense of the downbeat. Playful, vigorous lines are traded from one voice to another. Wild, unpredictable outbursts suggest a kind of rugged good humour which is both terrifying and exhilarating. The final bars descend into laughter with a series of “wrong” notes.
3. A quiet mysticism here foreshadows some of the great Beethovenian *Adagios* that lay ahead in the last great works. Deepest introspection and soul-searching, tinged with melancholy, grow from a stark open interval of a 5th, a sound which pulls us back to an ancient memory of chant or lamenting. At moments it resembles the funeral march of the *Eroica* Symphony. On the last page of his sketches for this movement, Beethoven wrote the cryptic phrase, “A weeping willow or acacia tree on my brother’s grave.” There has been speculation that this is a masonic reference. The final bars drift off into a shimmering, yet ruminating cadenza for the solo-violin. The Adagio does not officially end, and - 200 ahead of its time - the DJ overlaps tracks with a crossfade into the last movement.
4. Paying homage to Razumovsky, the final movement is built on a Russian folksong, “Ah, Whether It’s My Luck, Such Luck” (Akh! talan li moi, talan takoi). Originally a lament, Beethoven transforms this melody into an exuberant and joyful statement. In the final moments, the theme drifts off into the ultimate dreamy repose before galloping to an exhilarating conclusion.

The Dante Quartet

The Dante Quartet, one of the UK’s finest ensembles, is known for its imaginative programming and impassioned performances. The Quartet was founded in 1995 and chose its name to reflect the idea of an epic journey. The Quartet has been honoured with the Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Chamber Music and has also received international awards for its recordings.

Frequently heard on Radio 3, the Quartet has appeared many times at London’s Wigmore Hall and Kings Place, and at some of the UK’s foremost festivals and music societies. Abroad, the Quartet has played in France, Germany, Holland, Spain, Switzerland, Finland, the Czech Republic and Poland, and has twice toured Japan.

The Dante Quartet has made a series of acclaimed recordings for Hyperion, winning the BBC Music Magazine Award and the French Diapason d’Or. The Quartet has also recorded for Signum and Toccata Records and their recording of the string quartets by Herbert Howells was released on the Naxos label in 2019. The Dante Quartet has recently recorded the eight string quartets and two quintets of C.V. Stanford on the SOMM label.

The Quartet has performed cycles of the complete Beethoven and Shostakovich string quartets in single marathon weekends. They have collaborated with playwright Clare Norburn (author of concert-drama 'Breaking the Rules') on a dramatized version of Beethoven’s quartet cycle, featuring actor David Timson as the composer. This innovative format has proved popular and has been performed many times.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



South African violinist **Zoë Beyers** was born in Stellenbosch and her initial violin studies were under the late Noel Travers. She has established a reputation as one of the finest and most versatile violinists based in the UK, and performs worldwide as soloist, chamber musician, director and orchestral leader.

Highlights of the 2019/2020 season include appearances at the Wigmore Hall with IMusicanti, the St Magnus Festival in Orkney and the Edinburgh International Festival with Hebrides Ensemble, solo appearances with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, English Symphony Orchestra, Norwich Philharmonic and Warwick Symphony Orchestra.

Zoë appears regularly as guest leader of the Hallé, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, BBC Philharmonic and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestras, the CBSO, the Philharmonia, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Orquesta Nacional de España at the invitation of Maestro Juanjo Mena.

Since 2017, Zoë has been the concertmaster of the English Symphony Orchestra, collaborating closely with them as director and soloist.

In September 2020, Zoë took up the position of concertmaster of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra.

As a chamber musician Zoë appears with the Hebrides Ensemble, Nash Ensemble, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and the London Sinfonietta.

She has recently joined the renowned Dante Quartet as their first violinist.

Zoë has a passionate interest in education, teaching at the Birmingham Conservatoire and coaching violinists and ensembles at the start of their careers. She is proud to be involved in ARCO, a distance learning collaboration between Birmingham Conservatoire and students in deprived areas.



South African violinist **Ian Watson** completed his BMus (Honours) at the University of Stellenbosch under Suzanne Martens in 2005. Following a two year appointment in the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, he moved to Scotland to complete his Mmus at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in 2008.

After graduating, Ian formed a duo with celebrated guitarist-composer, Marek Pasieczny. This collaboration led to invitations to Italy, Japan, South Africa and Poland, where they subsequently became Laureate of the Nowa Tradycja Competition in Warsaw, 2008.

Ian joined the Royal Northern Sinfonia in 2010, under the direction of Thomas Zehetmair. Two years later he was appointed Principal 1st Violin of the Hallé Orchestra, under Sir Mark Elder. Highlights from this period include Parsifal at the BBC Proms (2013) and a number of tours within Europe, China and South America.

Since leaving the Hallé in 2015, Ian has enjoyed a varied career as a guest Principal 2nd Violin and Co-Leader with some of Britain's major orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, BBC SSO, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra, Welsh National Opera, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, London Mozart Players, and the Hague Philharmonic Orchestra.

Ian plays in the first violin section of the Aurora Orchestra, which has earned international recognition for performing symphonic works entirely from memory.

In 2019 he joined the Dante String Quartet. He lives in Chester with his wife and two children.

Carol Ella is from Wick, in the far north of Scotland.

At 17, she won a Foundation Scholarship to study with Simon Rowland-Jones at London's Royal College of Music. She furthered her studies in Utrecht, NL, as part of the Erasmus exchange programme, before returning to the RCM, where she performed the Bartok Viola Concerto with the RCM Sinfonietta, graduating with Distinction.



Carol has always had a passion for orchestral playing, having held positions with both the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the London Symphony Orchestra. She is a regular member of the John Wilson Orchestra and Sinfonia of London, and has played as Guest Principal with many UK orchestras, such as Aurora, Britten Sinfonia, City of London Sinfonia, BBC Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

As a tutor, Carol has taken viola classes at the Royal College of Music, the Royal Academy of Music, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

In 2011, Carol was selected by Oliver Knussen to play for his Aldeburgh Festival Ensemble in chamber performances across Europe with a subsequent recording of Britten's Rape of Lucretia. She was honoured to play at his memorial concert 'Celebrating Olly' at the Royal Academy of Music in 2018 and has since played Principal Viola with the Knussen Chamber Orchestra.

Memorisation, choreography, and the occasional attempt at singing, are just a few of the exciting and challenging aspects of performing that Carol has grown to relish with such diverse and explosive groups as Manchester Collective and Scottish Ensemble.

Classical music aside, a love for musicals has been indulged over the years with forays into London's West End. Carol has also enjoyed recording albums with the likes of Neil Diamond, Emeli Sandé, and Sir Paul McCartney, and has performed live with various rock and pop stars. Particular highlights being Ed Sheeran, and a series of concerts with Barbra Streisand at the O2 Arena.

Carol's viola is by Nigel Harris, made for her in 2001, and generously supported by the Virtuosi Society of Scotland.



Richard Jenkinson's musical education began at the age of five when he started to play the cello and was awarded a scholarship by Derbyshire County Council to study with Florence Hooton and William Pleeth.

Whilst in the sixth form, Richard began his conducting studies with Michael Salter at Repton School. In 1990 he won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, studying cello with Raphael Wallfisch and William Pleeth and conducting with Alan Hazeldine.

He graduated with Distinction in 1994 and was awarded the Guildhall's coveted Gold Medal for a performance of the Dvořák Cello Concerto in the Barbican.

In 1995 he was awarded a top prize at the Vittorio Gui Chamber Music Competition in Italy and was invited to be part of the Countess of Munster recital scheme. This has led to a very productive partnership with the pianist Benjamin Frith, including recitals at London's Wigmore Hall and South Bank Centre and several recordings.

Richard has given concerto performances with the BBC Concert Orchestra, C.B.S.O., Irish Chamber Orchestra and Venezuelan Symphony and has performed the Elgar Concerto in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and the Dvořák Concerto in the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague. In 1995 Richard became principal cello with the Irish Chamber Orchestra and from 1998-2016 he was principal cello with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. He has acted as guest principal for BBC

Scottish, English Symphony, Halle, London Concert, Opera North, Orchestra of the Swan, Philharmonia, Royal Northern Sinfonia and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestras.

In May 2012 Richard joined the Dante String Quartet and has performed at the Wigmore Hall, King's Place and also given several live BBC Radio 3 broadcasts. The quartet's 'Beethoven journey' was also featured on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. As the cellist of the Dante Quartet he has recorded Kodály's String Quartets for Hyperion, Herbert Howells Quartets for Naxos and Stanford's Complete String Quartets on the Somm label. The quartet has performed several cycles of the complete Beethoven Quartets and toured Japan in 2016. During 2018 the Dante Quartet played a cycle of Shostakovich Quartets and undertook tours of France and Japan. Richard has played concerts with the Allegri and Coull String Quartets and has performed with the Fibonacci Sequence, Michael Collins and the Wigmore Soloists at the Wigmore Hall in 2021.

Richard is Musical Director of the British Police Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of St John, Bromsgrove. From 2016-19 he was Music Director of the orchestra and choir of the G.K.T. Music Society at King's College, London and, since September 2017, has been conductor of the Worcestershire Youth Orchestra. He has recently conducted cycles of the complete Beethoven Symphonies and Piano Concertos culminating with the Ninth Symphony in Worcester Cathedral. Concerts with the B.P.S.O. have included performances at Coventry, Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester Cathedrals and regular concerts at Beacon Park and Symphony Hall in Birmingham. In May 2019 Richard conducted the B.P.S.O. at the Royal Albert Hall, London in a Gala Concert celebrating the orchestra's 30th anniversary involving fanfare trumpets, troupes of bagpipers and massed choirs from around the United Kingdom which involved over 600 performers.

In 2019 Richard successfully defended his Ph.D. on the music of Zoltán Kodály at the University of Birmingham where he was awarded a Bramall scholarship. During the covid imposed lockdowns of 2020 he utilised the time to gain Grade 8 (in 100 days) and subsequently an ARSM diploma in Singing, which he passed with Distinction.