

Fiora Quartet I

Deniz Şensoy violin

Isabella Todes violin

Elena Accogli viola

Marion Portelance cello

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Quartet in D minor, Op.76 No.2, 'Fifths' (1796–7) 20'

- i. Allegro
- ii. Andante di molto più tosto allegretto
- iii. Menuetto. Allegro ma non troppo
- iv. Vivace assai

Philip Glass (b.1937)

Quartet No.2, 'Company' (1983)

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
- iv.

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Quartet No.9 in E flat, Op.117 (1964)

- i. Moderato con moto
- ii. Adagio
- iii. Allegretto
- iv. Adagio
- v. Allegro

Fiora Quartet is a Britten Pears Young Artist for 2024/25, here for a two-week residency on the Chamber Music in Residence course.

The Fiora Quartet was founded in 2021 at the Royal College of Music and has become a dynamic and versatile ensemble. Mentored by the Sacconi Quartet from 2021 to 2023, the Fiora was awarded second prize in the RCM String Quartet Competition, selected for the RCM String Quartet Platform scheme in the 2023/24 season and was a semi-finalist in the Royal Over-Seas League competition.

The Quartet's collaboration with renowned musicians include a side-by-side Shostakovich concert with the Brodsky Quartet, a Quartetto di Cremona showcase concert, and appearances at the Chipping Campden Festival, Sacconi Festival in Folkestone, and RCM Chamber Festival. The Quartet has also participated in public masterclasses with the Chiaroscuro and Marmen quartets.

In 2022, the Fiora Quartet was selected as one of three groups representing the UK in ANAM's Quartetthaus event, a collaboration with the Royal Albert Hall, and in 2024, it performed at exclusive events hosted by Van Cleef & Arpels at Highgrove House.

Haydn: Quartet in D minor, Op.76 No.2

By the mid 1790s, Haydn was widely acknowledged to be Europe's greatest composer and had almost 60 string quartets under his belt. It was four decades since he had – in effect – given birth to the 'modern' string quartet and since then, the genre had extended its reach well beyond the private dwellings of wealthy patrons and was now a firm fixture in the concert hall.

Haydn first experienced a public quartet performance in London and it can be no coincidence that on returning to Vienna, he embarked on some of his most ambitious chamber works – the Op.76 quartets – with a commission from the Hungarian Count Erdödy. These were among the finest quartets he ever wrote and were described by the historian Charles Burney as 'full of invention, fire, good taste and new effects'. Never, he said, had he received more pleasure from instrumental music.

This is the only one of the set in a minor key and is sometimes referred to as the 'Fifths' quartet, reflecting the pair of falling fifths that not only open the work but permeate the entire, often intense first movement. The Andante offers gentle respite before we are plunged into a stark, unrelenting canon – nicknamed the 'Witches' Minuet' – and a rustic trio with echoes of a village dance. The quartet ends with an Allegro that at times recalls the gypsy fiddlers of Haydn's childhood on the Austro-Hungarian border.

Glass: Quartet No.2, 'Company'

The long and illustrious history of the string quartet – beginning of course with Haydn – clearly weighed on Philip Glass, whose first three quartets have all been withdrawn. 'It is almost' he says, 'as if we say we're going to write a string quartet, take a deep breath and then wade in to write the most serious, significant piece we can.' His earliest surviving quartet was written in 1966 but it was almost two decades before he returned to the form, producing this second one in 1983.

It started out as incidental music for a production of Samuel Beckett's novella *Company*, described by one critic as 'Beckett's own Creation myth'. In it, an old man lies in the dark and ponders the nature of existence, and Glass felt that the medium of the string quartet would 'allow for both an introspective and passionate quality well suited to the text'. He writes in his own, minimalist style – he describes it as 'music

with repetitive structures' – and the four short movements coincide with natural pauses in the text. Standing alone, however, they form a cohesive whole which, says Glass, 'has now taken on a life of its own'.

Shostakovich: Quartet No.9

Compared with his very public symphonic cycle, Shostakovich's 15 string quartets are much more intimate. Written mainly for friends and family, they span nearly 40 years of his life and serve as a kind of musical diary, often reflecting the circumstances in which each was composed.

This Ninth Quartet comes just after the middle of the cycle and is the last of three particularly personal works, its predecessor – No.8 – being seen as akin to a suicide note. This one, however, reflects a more positive outlook. It was written at the very end of Khrushchev's so-called cultural 'thaw' – a period of relaxation following the restrictions of the Stalin era. Shostakovich was among the many composers who had begun to spread their creative wings and look to the West for new musical trends – not least, the rise of atonality. He began the quartet in 1961 intending, he said, to base it on 'themes from childhood' but he soon had what he called 'an attack of healthy self-criticism' and set fire to it. The work he released three years later was very different: unconnected with his distant youth and dedicated to his third wife, Irina, whom he'd married in 1962.

As in his two previous quartets, the movements are played without a break, although here, each 'ends' by previewing the theme of the next one. Shostakovich also alludes to works by other composers: Rossini's *William Tell* appears in the Allegretto and early Soviet listeners detected references in the opening to Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.

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