

Total performance time: approximately 60', with no interval

Chaos String Quartet I

Susanne Schäffer violin

Eszter Kruchió violin

Sara Marzadori viola

Bas Jongen cello

Fanny Hensel (1805–1847)
String Quartet in E flat (1834)

20'

- i. Adagio ma non troppo*
- ii. Allegretto*
- iii. Romanze*
- iv. Allegro molto vivace*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
String Quartet No.14 in C sharp minor,
Op.131 (1825–6)

40'

- i. Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo*
- ii. Allegro molto vivace*
- iii. Allegro moderato*
- iv. Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile*
- v. Presto*
- vi. Adagio quasi un poco andante*
- vii. Allegro*

The **Chaos String Quartet** is a Britten Pears Young Artist for 2023–24 and a participant on Chamber Music in Residence at Snape Maltings.

Founded in 2019 on the interdisciplinary concept of chaos, the Chaos String Quartet combines a highly refined ensemble culture and a fiery vitality with a passion for exploring experimental and improvisational approaches. With their affinity for embracing unpredictability and risk-taking, the ensemble's members bring a unique dynamism and vibrancy to their playing.

Recently selected as a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist for 2023–25, the quartet is rapidly establishing itself on the international music scene. It has been awarded prizes at the most prestigious international competitions, including ARD (2022), Bordeaux (2022), Haydn (2023) and Bad Tölz (2023). In 2023, the ensemble made its debut at the Musikverein in Vienna and the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg.

The ensemble has been mentored by Johannes Meissl in Vienna through the ECMaster programme, and has completed a postgraduate course at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole with the Cuarteto Casals.

Hensel: String Quartet in E flat

According to Fanny Mendelssohn's father, music was not a career for a woman, and while he encouraged the compositional efforts of her brother Felix, he said that for Fanny, music should be merely an 'ornament'. This was an attitude widely shared at the time – even by Felix, who suggested that Fanny was too conscientious even to think of music until her domestic duties had been fulfilled. 'Publishing would only disturb her in these, and I cannot say that I approve of it,' he said. Consequently, although some of her early compositions did appear in print, they often bore her brother's name. Once she had married, however, her husband Wilhelm Hensel – himself an accomplished artist – actively supported both her composing and the idea of publication.

Fanny's 1834 quartet is one of the first surviving string quartets to have been written by a woman. She based it on an unfinished piano sonata she had begun just before her marriage; five years later, she had transformed it into an extraordinarily rhapsodic work that took even its creator by surprise. She was not – as she put it – an 'eccentric or overly sentimental person' but eventually concluded that her influence must have been Beethoven, whose 'exceedingly moving and emotional style' she had encountered as a child.

The quartet had no public performance during Fanny Hensel's lifetime, and only one in private. To her dismay, her brother openly disapproved of the work: he felt that its departure from the Classical form she had been trained in – as well as what he called its 'tonal ambiguity' – suggested a lack of discipline. Fanny had always valued his opinion highly and – perhaps as a result of his criticism – never wrote another quartet. His reaction also seems to have shaken her self-belief. 'I lack the ability to sustain ideas properly and give them the needed consistency,' she said. She was best suited, she decided, to lieder, being merely 'pretty ideas' that needed no development.

Beethoven: String Quartet No.14 in C sharp minor, Op.131

When Beethoven delivered the manuscript of his C sharp minor quartet, he included a covering note stating that it was merely 'patched together with pieces filched from here and there'. His publisher, however, soon saw it for what it was, namely an entirely original and

hugely ambitious work which may now arguably be regarded as the finest of his late, great string quartets.

Beethoven gives each of the seven linked movements a separate number, although the structure is actually based on the four conventional movements, with two connecting interludes and a fugal introduction. Wagner described the opening as 'surely the saddest thing ever said in notes,' but it leads to the sunniest Allegro with all the hallmarks of a typical first movement. The third section, barely a minute long, sets the scene for the slow movement, a gloriously expressive set of variations that contrast sharply with the ensuing Presto. And after a dark, moody Adagio, the work comes full circle, with a return in the finale of the fugal theme that opened the quartet, this time with an intensity that moved Wagner to describe it as 'the fury of the world's dance'.

Of all Beethoven's string quartets, this one was his favourite: it was, he said, his 'most perfect single work'. Fellow composers agreed: Wagner went on to be positively extravagant in his approval and Schumann later declared that the quartet stood 'on the extreme boundary of all that has hitherto been attained by human art and imagination'. Reaction among contemporary performers, however, was mixed, the music being so radically ahead of its time that many of them were baffled. 'We know there is something there,' said one, 'but we do not know what it is.' Schubert, on the other hand, recognised its genius, and a few days before he died, asked a group of friends to play it at his bedside. When they had finished, he is said to have asked, 'After this, what is left for us to write?'

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The Britten Pears Young Artist Programme is made possible with the generous support of our Trusts & Foundations and Individual supporters

The Chaos Quartet's residency is supported by The Barbara Whatmore Charitable Trust



Supported using public funding by
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