



## Tilford Bach Society

### Late String Quartets



## Dante String Quartet

**Krycia Osostowicz – violin**

**Oscar Perks – violin**

**Yuko Inoue – viola**

**Richard Jenkinson – cello**

**6 October 2018**

**[www.tilbach.org.uk](http://www.tilbach.org.uk)**

## Programme

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

**String Quartet in E $\flat$  major, Opus 103**

*Andante grazioso;*

*Menuetto, ma non troppo presto*

In August 1804, Haydn's biographer, Griesinger wrote to his publishers Breitkopf and Hartel that "Haydn has stopped all work because of his health, and a quartet of which he has completed two movements is all he cares for, and to which he sometimes devotes a quarter of an hour". This D minor quartet was intended to supplement the two Op.77 works but was eventually published uncompleted as Op.103. The two movements we will hear probably represent the second and third movements of the quartet. Haydn added the following words to the score, a quote from his own chorale Der Greis: "Gone is all my strength, old and weak am I." This was perhaps "the last incandescence of the flame now held captive within the failing body" as Rosemary Hughes put it in her BBC guide to the Haydn quartets.

The Andante grazioso starts with one of Haydn's most gracious tunes though there are touches of chromaticism and contrapuntal textures. This leads into a development section where his modulation takes it into distant keys. The melody returns again followed by a long chromatic coda tinged with melancholy.

Although the Minuet is in three time, the edgy nature of it is far from the original dance form. The middle trio section in D major is more friendly vintage Haydn with teasing hesitations, strange irregular phrase lengths and jocular embellishments. Although only two movements long, this seems an appropriate final work for the man who elevated the string quartet to the heights from which it was taken on by other composers, notably Beethoven and Schubert.

**Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)**

**String Quartet No 15, Op.144**

*Elegy: Adagio; Serenade: Adagio; Intermezzo: Adagio; Nocturne: Adagio; Funeral March: Adagio molto; Epilogue: Adagio*

Shostakovich was already terminally ill when he wrote his final quartet, and he completed it in a Moscow hospital in May 1974. It was premiered in November of that year but he was able to supervise a recording of it before he died in August the following year. It is profoundly melancholic if not downright morbid, and consists of 6 movements which are played without a break. All are marked *Adagio*, and are in the traditionally morbid key of E flat minor.

The first movement, an elegy, starts with a fugue but is unhurried and peaceful and soon gives way to a second theme enunciated by the first violin. After a while the fugue theme returns and there is little development of these elements although the static nature of the music is surprisingly beautiful, truly elegiac and peaceful. The second movement starts with searing notes by each of the upper strings marked to start *ppp* rising to *sfff*, flowing by explosive pizzicato chords. This gives way to a grotesque waltz which is interrupted by a further series of the searing single notes before fading to a bass note on the cello at the start of the Intermezzo. This gives way to an almost angry cadenza on the first violin which slowly subsides to quiet chords. The Nocturne features a lyrical tune typical of Shostakovich on the viola with a moving accompaniment in the cello and the second violin high in its register. The first violin joins the others and the movement dies to a close after some pizzicato chords. Full chords mark the start of the fifth movement, ----

a funeral march, with the viola again taking the theme first, followed by the cello. The march progresses to the full quartet before the emotion subsides with soft chords on the upper strings and the cello enunciating the tune *pizzicato* before fading away to quietness. The final movement, epilogue, is announced by a cadenza for the first violin with lots of trills high on the E string before coming back to earth with a theme based on the first movement in the second violin and viola. The music gradually loses energy though still punctuated by pizzicato chords and a strange tremolo section, before becoming static and resigned, dying away into silence.

There is no doubt that Shostakovich intended this to be his last word on the string quartet. His quartets started innocently in C major (with no sharps or flats) and finished 36 years later in this quartet in a world of memories, pain, resignation, peace and death in the ultimately distant key signature of six flats.

### Interval

**(Drinks are free but donations to costs are much appreciated)**

## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

### String Quartet No 14 in C# minor, Opus 131

*Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo; Allegro molto vivace;  
Allegro moderato; Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile;  
Presto; Adagio quasi un poco andante; Allegro*

This work was Beethoven's penultimate complete quartet and, according to Karl Holz, one of the violinists associated with the premieres of the late quartets, Beethoven considered it his greatest. Completed in 1826, it was published 3 months after his death by Schott of Mainz. It is written in seven sections which are played almost without pause.

The first movement is a light and airy fugue which slowly fades away and then the second movement – a secretive, quizzical scherzo – steals in. This is, in effect, a continuous variation on a gently rocking melody which makes prominent play with the pairs of semitones from the fugue. After a sudden boisterous outburst the movement fades inconclusively. Then two brisk chords initiate a few bars of quasi-operatic recitative, which forms a brief interlude between the scherzo and the central (fourth) movement which is also a series of six variations on a simple theme introduced on the violins with pizzicato accompaniment. After the sixth variation, there is a short coda full of trills which dies out softly into the ether.

An arpeggio by the cello in the relative major starts the fifth movement, a jagged Presto with a smoother trio section which uses a variant of the opening tune and comes round twice before Beethoven ends with a coda where the instruments play the main theme sul ponticello (ie with the bows close to the bridge).

The sixth section is a brief but intensely poignant Adagio quasi un poco Andante that functions as an introduction to the last movement. In this finale Beethoven uses sonata form and returns to the opening key, C sharp minor thus completing a circle by linking to the first movement.

Op 131 quartet is a major work as intricate and worked out as any of his symphonies (and longer than many of them). As each movement tends to dissolve into the next without a break, it demands intense concentration from the players and not a little from the audience as we follow Beethoven's magisterial invention, as he conjures connections with early sections like a magician's sleight of hand, giving the whole quartet a satisfying unity.

*Notes by Trevor Gray*

## Dante String Quartet

The Dante Quartet was founded by Krysia Osostowicz in 1995, its name inspired by the idea of an epic journey. The quartet has appeared at all the major UK festivals and concert societies, as well as in many European countries, and will make its second tour of Japan later this year. Recipient of many awards, including the Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Chamber Music, the Diapason d'Or and the BBC Music Magazine Award, the Dante Quartet has recorded several discs for Hyperion – including works by Kodaly, Smetana, Sibelius, Faure, Debussy and Ravel – and is currently recording Stanford's complete quartets, many of them unpublished, for SOMM Records. Other projects for the 2018/19 season include a marathon weekend of all 15 Shostakovich string quartets and a series of performances of "Beethoven's Quartet Journey" – an innovative Beethoven cycle performed in the presence of the composer himself, consummately acted by David Timson with a script by Clare Norburn. Committed also to teaching, the Dante Quartet held an extended residency at King's College, Cambridge, and now gives annual chamber music courses in England and France. The quartet also runs its own thriving Dante Summer Festival in the Tamar Valley ([www.dantefestival.org](http://www.dantefestival.org)), attracting enthusiastic local audiences and visitors from all over the UK.

### Future Farnham Concerts

**Saturday 13 October 2018: 7-30pm**

St Andrew's Parish Church, Farnham, GU9 7PW

**Farnham Sinfonia**

**Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart, Sibelius**

**Saturday 27 October 2018: 7-30pm**

St Andrew's Parish Church, Farnham, GU9 7PW

**Lipatti Piano Quartet**

**Mozart, Mahler, Brahms**

**Saturday 24 November 2018: 7-30pm**

Farnham United Reformed Church, GU9 7RN

**Brook Street Band**

**Bach, Handel etc**

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### Future Godalming Concerts

Godalming Baptist Church GU7 1BA

**Saturday 20 October 2018: 6-30pm**

**Florizel Quartet**

**Dvorak, Moeran and Britten**

**Thursday 1 November 2018: 12-30pm**

**Ami Lodge Flute/Piano Duo**

**Saturday 17 November 2018: 6-30pm**

**Cello & Violin Duo**

### TBS Secretary

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