

Total performance time: approximately 100 minutes, including an interval of 20 minutes

## Quartet: An Evening of Words and Music

[Fenella Humphreys](#) violin  
[Nicola Eimer](#) piano  
[Dr Leah Broad](#) author / reader

### Programme to include:

<b>Ethel Smyth</b> (1858–1944) Violin Sonata in A minor, Op.7 (1887): <i>i. Allegro moderato</i>	9'
<b>Doreen Carwithen</b> (1922–2003) Violin Sonata (1951): <i>i. Allegro con moto</i>	8'
<b>Rebecca Clarke</b> (1886–1979) Midsummer Moon (1924) Sonata in G (1908–9)	6' 6'
<b>Dorothy Howell</b> (1898–1982) Sonata in F minor (by 1947): <i>ii. Andante</i> The Moorings (1924, rev.1925)	8' 5'
<b>Ethel Smyth</b> Violin Sonata in A minor, Op.7 (1887): <i>iv. Finale: Allegro vivace</i>	6'

**Ethel Smyth:**  
**Violin Sonata, Op.7**

As Smyth tells it in her (many) memoirs, she had to fight tooth and nail to study at Leipzig Conservatoire. Coming from the upper middle-class, her father was strongly opposed to her having any kind of career, and composition was considered especially improper for women to pursue. Ultimately Smyth did get her way — after refusing to eat, leave her room, or participate in any family activities. In Leipzig she met many figures who would shape her music and her career, chief among them Brahms, Clara Schumann, Grieg, and Tchaikovsky, who thought she ‘gave promise in the future of a serious and talented career’.

Smyth’s Violin Sonata dates from 1887 and was dedicated to Felix Mendelssohn’s daughter, Lili, who was one of Smyth’s closest friends alongside the musician Elisabeth von Herzogenberg. Much influenced by Brahms, it is a serious and profound work, full of intense motivic development and rich harmonic colour.

**Doreen Carwithen:**  
**Sonata for Violin and Piano**

Carwithen’s Violin Sonata did not have the most auspicious of starts. When the BBC Music Panel considered it for broadcast in 1952, they rejected it as ‘poverty-stricken’, one reader lamenting condescendingly that ‘it is rather sad to observe that this young composer ... is just not good enough’. It fell into obscurity in the later 20th century, but has since fared rather better — when Fenella Humphreys and Nathan Williamson recorded the Sonata in 2017, *BBC Music Magazine*’s 5-star review thought it revealed a ‘striking creative personality’.

Carwithen had a real flair for the dramatic. The opening of the tumultuous first movement is remarkably restrained, but blossoms into passionate climaxes with the violin soaring above the piano’s chords, eventually concluding serenely.

**Rebecca Clarke:**  
**Midsummer Moon and Sonata in G**

Although Clarke was best-known as a viola player, she started out learning the violin. Chamber music was her natural home; she grew up playing in an ensemble with her family, and later toured Britain, Europe, America and Asia as a much sought-after chamber musician. It’s obvious from her compositions that she knows the violin intimately; she writes idiomatically, and always gives the performer a chance to shine.

The Sonata is one of her early student works, written when she was studying with Charles Villiers Stanford at the Royal College of Music. Even so, it bears many of Clarke’s hallmarks — such as a bold opening passage for the soloist — if not the rhythmic and harmonic innovation that characterises many of her mature works, such as *Midsummer Moon*. This was written in 1924, by which point Clarke was an established composer and performer with multiple high-profile successes behind her. It is a much more modernist piece than the Sonata, and is dedicated to the violinist Adila Fachiri who both commissioned and premiered the work.

**Dorothy Howell:**  
**The Moorings and Violin Sonata in F minor**

Howell wrote extensively for the violin, being both a violinist and pianist herself (indeed, alongside her composition she had a flourishing career as both a concert pianist and piano teacher). Her style is extremely evocative, and many of her instrumental works have illustrative titles, such as *The Moorings* (1924). Here, she conjures up the water in calm mood, the rocking piano part perhaps suggesting the lapping of ripples against the moored boats. The Violin Sonata is a much later work, penned at a difficult time in Howell’s life. Composition was interrupted by the Second World War — and by the deaths of Howell’s mother, with whom she was extremely close, and her best friend Elsie Owen, who was murdered by her husband in 1941. Owen was a violinist, and when Howell finally completed her Sonata in the late 1940s, she dedicated the score to her. The second-movement Andante is one of Howell’s most heartfelt movements, moving between hope and wistfulness before closing in a mood of profound melancholy; perhaps it was in some ways an elegy for Owen.