

Total performance time: approximately 60', with no interval

## Isla String Quartet

**Mio Takahashi** violin

**Kynan Walker** violin

**Catherine Anushka White** viola

**Danushka Edirisinghe** cello

**Joseph Haydn** (1731–1809)  
String Quartet in D, Op.20 No.4 (1772) 30'

*i. Allegro di molto*

*ii. Un poco adagio e affettuoso*

*iii. Menuetto: Allegretto alla zingarese –  
Trio*

*iv. Presto e scherzando*

**Caroline Shaw** (b.1982)  
Plan & Elevation: The Grounds of  
Dumbarton Oaks (2015) 15'

*i. The Ellipse*

*ii. The Cutting Garden*

*iii. The Herbaceous Border*

*iv. The Orangery*

*v. The Beech Tree*

**Dmitry Shostakovich** (1906–1975)  
String Quartet No.7 in F sharp minor,  
Op.108 (1960) 12'

*i. Allegretto*

*ii. Lento*

*iii. Allegro – Allegretto*

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

The Isla String Quartet is comprised of students from the Royal Academy of Music (RAM). It was selected to be a member of the RAM Advanced Specialist Strings Ensemble Training Scheme in 2023, generously funded by the Frost Trust, and receives coaching from John Myerscough, cellist of the Doric String Quartet.

As a newly formed quartet, it has exciting projects coming up, including a lunchtime recital at RAM in February and collaborating with pianist Sherri Lun to perform Dvořák's Piano Quintet No.2 at Drapers' Hall, London, in May.

Violinist Mio Takahashi was a strings category finalist of the BBC Young Musician of the Year 2020. British-Japanese violinist Kynan Walker has played chamber music at Wigmore Hall, Conway Hall and the Hatfield House Festival. Scottish-Sri Lankan violist Catherine Anushka White gives two recitals in Cambridge this year. As a freelancer, cellist Danushka Edirisinghe has played in Britten Sinfonia, Chineke! Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra.

## Haydn: String Quartet in D, Op.20 No.4

By the time he embarked on his Op.20 quartets, Haydn was working at the remote court of Esterháza. Although he often longed to be nearer the thriving musical scene in Vienna, he admitted that the enforced isolation enabled him to become truly original. He had been writing quartets for over a decade but the Op.20 set marked a real turning point, leading to him becoming the acknowledged 'father of the string quartet'.

In the Op.20 quartets, Haydn began to move away from the courtly and somewhat simplified musical style that prevailed at the time. As he abandoned countless conventions, he also laid down a quartet 'structure' that has been a model ever since. For the first time, the instruments are treated as four fully independent voices rather than a solo violin part with three accompanists – particularly noticeable here in the second movement theme and variations, in which the plaintive D minor theme is passed to each instrument in turn. The minuet is similarly innovative: Instead of the standard courtly dance, Haydn marks the movement 'alla zingarese' – in Hungarian gypsy style – and uses such wacky rhythms that dancing to it would have been well-nigh impossible. The Op.20 set became known as the 'Sun' Quartets after the picture of a rising sun on one early edition: nowadays, they may justifiably be regarded as the first great string quartet masterworks.

## Shaw: Plan & Elevation

The historic estate of Dumbarton Oaks near Washington, DC, was donated to Harvard University in 1940, to be used 'for study and research into the Humanities and Fine Arts'. Although the centre has long been associated with Stravinsky's eponymous concerto, it had not had an official musician in residence until the appointment of Caroline Shaw just before the 75th anniversary in 2015. When devising a work to mark the occasion, Shaw found her inspiration in the formally designed gardens.

The title, *Plan and Elevation*, refers to the overall layout of the grounds as presented in an architect's drawing. In the individual movements, Shaw examines her personal experience in some of the different spaces. Each section is composed over a simple, ground (repeated) bass line supporting a particular musical idea. The first movement – 'The Ellipse' – considers the notion of infinite repetition suggested by the

stone paths that wind through the terraced gardens, the steps gradually fading into nothing. In 'The Cutting Garden', Shaw creates a collage, combining snatches of quartets by Ravel and Mozart with earlier works of her own, hoping, she says, to illustrate the variety of flowers grown there. 'The Herbaceous Border' starts by suggesting the rigid geometry of a formal design, building briefly into chaos before subsiding into a more natural calm. 'The Orangery' evokes the shadows cast by sunlight peeking through the vine leaves. Finally, Shaw's favourite spot in the garden is 'The Beech Tree', – which, she says, is 'strong, simple, ancient, elegant and quiet, and needs no introduction'.

## Shostakovich: String Quartet No.7

Had Shostakovich continued to follow the strict sequence of keys he used for his first six quartets, No.7 would have been in E flat major. In the years leading up to its composition in 1940, however, he had faced not only the deaths of both his mother and his first wife, Nina, but also the collapse of his second marriage – events that guided him instead to F sharp minor, a key traditionally associated with suffering. Shostakovich dedicated the work to Nina's memory. It was premiered in 1960 – the year she would have turned 50. Significantly, the first performance took place in May, a month which had marked not only the couple's engagement but also the births of both their children.

This is the shortest of Shostakovich's 15 string quartets but the three linked movements display a surprisingly wide range of moods, surely reflecting the composer's complex state of mind. The jaunty, agitated opening leads imperceptibly to a more restful section that is almost hypnotic until the spell is broken abruptly at the start of a fierce finale. Here, the pressure mounts rapidly until suddenly the music loses its force and dies away, to end – as in the first movement – on a major chord, suggesting perhaps a glimmer of hope for the future.

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