

SACCONI QUARTET

WEDNESDAY 7 JULY 2021



Ben Hancox violin
Hannah Dawson violin
Robin Ashwell viola
Cara Berridge cello

Haydn Quartet in C, Op 54 No 2
Ravel Quartet in F

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

Quartet in C, Op 54 No 2, Hoboken No. III:57

Vivace

Adagio

Menuetto: Allegretto

Finale: Adagio - Presto - Adagio

It is not known precisely how many string quartets Haydn composed during the course of his lifetime. According to Anthony van Hoboken's catalogue of the composer's works (each one allocated a 'Hoboken' or 'Hob.' Number) there are 83 of which sixty-eight are quartets, and the remainder arrangements and spurious works. What is certain though is that he raised the status of the quartet from that of a suite or divertimento to the form that is still recognisable as a model to contemporary composers.

Op 54 No 2 is No 57 in the listed cycle and is the second of 12 quartets dedicated to the violinist Johann Tost, the leader of the second violins in Haydn's Esterházy Orchestra. Tost was obviously a colourful character in the orchestra and found ways of pirating and selling compositions strictly belonging to his master. He eventually left the orchestra, having married one of Prince Esterházy's housekeepers, and became a prosperous cloth-merchant. Later he had some complicated, but lucrative, dealings with another composer Louis Spohr. However he obviously had Haydn's respect and friendship.

The work which the Sacconi Quartet perform is acknowledged as one of the greatest of all Haydn's quartets, with critic Hans Keller, in *The Great Haydn Quartets* (New York, 1986), declaring: '*It can be safely suggested that there is no more original Haydn quartet, nor any that contains more prophetic innovations.*' Written, along with the other two works in the Op 54 set, in Autumn 1788, it opens with a movement which immediately offers the first violin opportunity to display virtuosic flair. The hymn-like second movement is followed by a Minuet which was popular enough for Haydn to arrange it as one of the short pieces used for the musical clocks constructed by the Esterháza librarian, Pater Primitivus Niemecz. For the finale Haydn opts for the unexpected, with an Adagio opening followed by an energetic Presto section before concluding the work in serene mode with a return to the Adagio material.

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Quartet in F (1902-03)

Allegro moderato (Très doux)

Assez vif, très rythmé

Très lent

Vif et agité

The two biggest influences on Ravel's musical development were Fauré and Debussy, the former giving him formal tuition, the latter providing more general inspiration. His quartet relates to both of them. It is dedicated to Fauré, but has obvious resemblances to Debussy's only quartet, written ten years previously. Debussy, for his part, had a very high opinion of his young compatriot's quartet, writing of it, '*in the name of the gods of music and in mine, do not alter anything in your quartet*'. The two pieces are their composers' only work in the medium, both are early works and both introduce a period in their composer's lives in which they first achieved recognition. Moreover, the quartets resemble one another in actual construction, each having four movements, the first and last in rapid tempo, the second in scherzo style, and the contrasting third in slow tempo. Ravel's chamber music is characterised by neatness and precision (Stravinsky called him "a Swiss clockmaker"); everything here is crystal clear and neatly articulated. He uses no fewer than nine principal themes to form the material of his four-movement work.

The first movement is lyrical in mood, and shows classical restraint throughout. The Scherzo has a Spanish flavour, and is full of rhythmic ambiguities: some have discerned in it the imprint of Javanese gamelan. The slow movement, meditative in nature, has numerous changes of tempo, and includes some musical references to the opening Allegro. The brilliant concluding Finale introduces the last new theme, which is cleverly interwoven with varieties of earlier material.

Ravel was never entirely satisfied with this work, once declaring that its construction was 'imperfectly realised', and Fauré (its dedicatee) thought the last movement too short. But it quickly won, and still holds, a secure place in the string quartet repertory as one of the composer's freshest and happiest achievements.

Sacconi Quartet

The award-winning Sacconi Quartet are recognised for their unanimous and compelling ensemble. Formed in 2001, their four founder members continue to demonstrate a shared passion for string quartet repertoire, infectiously reaching out to audiences with their energy and enthusiasm. The Sacconi enjoy a busy international career, and are Quartet in Association at the Royal College of Music and Quartet in Residence in Folkestone.

The Sacconis' prolific recording career covers a broad swathe of repertoire from Haydn to present day. Their latest album featuring world premiere recordings of works by Roxanna Panufnik is just released on Signum Classics. Releases of recent years include premiere recordings of works by Jonathan Dove, Graham Fitkin and John McCabe. *In Damascus*, their CD of music by Jonathan Dove, hit the Classical Top Ten, and was chosen as one of Gramophone Magazine's Recordings of the Year.

Last season saw the quartet make their debut in Russia with pianist Peter Donohoe. They continued their performances of Dove's *In Damascus* with Mark Padmore and Robin Tritschler, and gave several performances of their inimitable *Beethoven in the Dark*. Firm advocates of new music, the Sacconi recently premiered their latest commission from Graham Fitkin, *Loosening* for saxophone and quartet. Last season they gave world premieres by Judith Bingham, Roxanna Panufnik and John Woolrich, and toured with Helen Grime's string quartet. Future commissions and premieres include quartets from Jonathan Dove and Judith Bingham and a string quintet from Nicola LeFanu.

The Sacconi Quartet is Quartet in Residence for the town of Folkestone and its surrounding areas, enabling creative collaborations with local artists and projects, and an embedded outreach programme. The Sacconi Chamber Music Festival in Folkestone is firmly established among the UK's major chamber music festivals and attracts audiences from far and near for its vibrant atmosphere and dynamic programming.

In 2015 the quartet launched *HEARTFELT*, their most innovative project to date. A radical re-interpretation of Beethoven's Op 132 quartet, *HEARTFELT* pushed the boundaries of chamber music through combining sound, light and touch, for a truly unique performance in which audience members connected with each performer's heartbeat through holding robotic 'hearts'.

In March, the quartet released an exclusive film of Jonathan Dove's *Out of Time* on Amazon with all proceeds going to Hands Up Foundation, a young and innovative charity that delivers aid directly and effectively to Syrians in need. The Quartet is indebted to the Royal Society of Musicians and Ellen Solomon for the use of their instruments.

The Sacconi Quartet celebrate their 20th Anniversary in the 2021-22 season, performing their latest commission from Jonathan Dove *On the Streets and In the Sky* alongside their favourite works from across their twenty years together. They will also continue to tour with *Beethoven in the Dark*, their Immersive performance of Beethoven's Op 131 quartet entirely from memory, in almost complete darkness. *'This stunner from the Sacconi Quartet was all about letting the music speak. Eyes open or closed, it was all you got.'* **Classic FM**

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OMAR PUENTE SEXTET

Friday 16 July 8pm

Internationally renowned for his masterful performances, world class violinist Omar Puente and his band fill the hall with a fusion of rhythms from Cuba, Brazil, Africa, Caribbean, Jazz, modern UK sound and further afield. Featuring music from his 2016 release *Best Foot Forward*, join us for some irresistible Latin-infused jazz, rich with energy and colour - the perfect soundtrack to a balmy summer night.

CRAIG OGDEN AND GARY RYAN

Sunday 18 July 7.30pm

Two of the world's leading guitarists, Gary Ryan and Craig Ogden perform music spanning centuries and continents with sparkling and imaginative arrangements that breathe new life into familiar repertoire. Their programme includes arrangements of Vivaldi's much-loved Concerto in D, RV93 for mandolin, strings and continuo and Rossini's Overture to the *Barber of Seville*.

Presented by Southampton Classical Guitar Society in association with Turner Sims

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