

Carducci Quartet & Anton Lesser

Life, Letters and Friendship

Sunday 10 March 2024



Carducci String Quartet

Matthew Denton, Michelle Fleming violin

Eoin Schmidt Martin viola

Emma Denton cello

Anton Lesser narrator

Shostakovich

A selection of movements from string quartets:

Polka – Two pieces for String Quartet (1931)

Muddle instead of Music (28th January 1936, *Pravda*)

Quartet No 1 in C, Op 49 – I. Moderato

Letters from Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman

Quartet No 2 in A, Op 68 – I. Overture: Moderato con moto

Zhdanov decree (1948)

Quartet No 4 in D, Op 83 – I. Allegretto

Recollections of a concert performance of Shostakovich's Quartet No 4

Quartet No 4 in D major, Op 83 – II. Andantino

Telephone call with Stalin (March 1949)

Quartet No 7 in F sharp minor, Op 108 – I. Allegretto

Story of a friendship – Glikman

Quartet No 8 in C minor, Op 110 – I. Largo & II. Allegro molto

Interval

Story of a friendship – Glikman

Quartet No 10 in Ab major, Op 118 – Adagio

Story of a friendship – Glikman

Quartet No 11 in F minor, Op 122 – IV. Etude & V. Humoresque

Nikita Khrushchev, Declaration on Music in Soviet Society (March 8, 1963)

Quartet No 13 in Bb minor, Op 138 – Doppio movimento

Story of a friendship – Glikman

Quartet No 15 in E flat minor, Op 144 – VI. Epilogue: Adagio

Dmitri Shostakovich's music enjoys universal appeal, writes Leon Bosch.

The depth and originality of his contribution to the genres of the symphony and the string quartet in particular rank alongside Haydn and Beethoven. Every note he wrote is inextricably linked to the history of the 20th Century, but it is the analysis of its significance and meaning that divides opinion.

Shostakovich's life and work is frequently interpreted solely through the prism of the Cold War, but his music has triumphed despite the shackles of history.

His fifteen string quartets, composed between 1938 and 1974, are cornerstones of the repertoire, and the Carducci String Quartet know them intimately, having performed and recorded them many times.

Shostakovich has a special significance for the quartet's cellist Emma Denton, who has devised this afternoon's exploration of the composer's life.

It was a teenage encounter that led Emma to devote her life to performing in a string quartet. She recalls performing Shostakovich 8 alongside her now husband, Matthew, after winning a string quartet competition. 'We were on stage in the Royal Albert Hall, surrounded by thousands of people. We felt so small, but it was that experience that made me feel that this is what I wanted to be doing.'

She is convinced that in contrast to Shostakovich's symphonies, that were composed overwhelmingly for public consumption and scrutiny, 'you do get more of that intimate side of his outpourings coming through his string quartets'.

Sensitive to Shostakovich's social and political roots, Emma articulates the story of his life as expressed through Shostakovich's own correspondence with his close friend Isaac Glickman, various decrees from the Soviet bureaucracy, the recollections of trusted friends, and his string quartets.

This afternoon's narrator, Anton Lesser, sets proceedings in motion with the poignant words of violinist David Oistrakh, dedicatee of both Shostakovich's violin concertos, describing the terror of life in Moscow during 1937 when everyone feared the secret police's knock on the door.

The musical journey then begins with the brief and at times dissonant polka that predates all Shostakovich's quartets. It exemplifies his already distinctive musical voice and is, in Emma's words, 'quite shocking'. It encompasses sentiments that range from the exuberant, through the tragic, to the sardonic.

In 1938 Shostakovich composed his first string quartet, which Emma justifiably describes as 'beautiful, melodic, innocent, and so far removed from the thirteenth quartet, which inhabits a completely different sound world'.

The tumultuous journey through the string quartets is punctuated by a range of texts: an exchange of letters between Shostakovich and Glickman – the Zhdanov Decree that reprimanded selected Soviet composers, including Shostakovich, for their supposed departure from natural and healthy standards in music – Dubinsky's account of the première of the Fourth Quartet – the telephone conversation with Stalin in which Shostakovich is invited to travel to the USA for the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace – Stalin's death in 1953 – Khrushchev's declaration



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on music in Soviet Society – and the death of Shostakovich's first wife, Nina Vasiliyevna in 1954. The seventh quartet, of which we shall hear the first movement, was composed in her memory.

Then we arrive at Shostakovich's most widely known quartet, No 8 in C minor, which is dedicated to 'the victims of fascism and war'. Its popularity has been enhanced by Rudolf Barshai's arrangement for string orchestra that Shostakovich himself endorsed. But controversy still rages about the quartet's true meaning.

After the interval follows a series of sometimes cheerful, sometimes grim letters from Shostakovich to his friend Isaak Glikman: one from his hospital bed in 1962 excitedly tells Glikman about his new and youthful wife, Irina Anotonovna, whilst another, two years later in 1964, speaks mischievously of having completed his tenth quartet, dedicated to fellow composer Moysey Vainberg, with whom he pursued a good-natured rivalry in respect of the number of quartets they had each written.

Quartet number thirteen, from which we will hear the jazz pizzicato section, is a tour de force for the viola – it was dedicated to Vadim Borisovsky, then violist of the Beethoven String Quartet – and in addition to the generous use

of pizzicato, it also experiments with 12-tone serialism, and percussive effects.

Meanwhile, despite the challenging political climate and his failing health, Shostakovich continued to compose, and in 1974 he completed his fifteenth and final string quartet – some way short of the cycle of twenty-four that he'd apparently intended.

The Carducci Quartet bring their portrait of Shostakovich to a conclusion with the emotionally bleak and wrenching 'Epilogue' from this fifteenth quartet. Kurt Sanderling, a friend of the composer, speculated that Shostakovich meant the work as an epitaph for himself, 'perhaps because it was so unfathomably terrifying that he could not dedicate it to anyone'.

Shostakovich died an embittered man on 9th August 1975. He had been scarred by official denunciations, and the compromises he felt obliged to make with Stalinism, but this demoralisation and disorientation notwithstanding, he was still able to distil powerful emotions into his music, emotions that resonate with all of humanity.

This powerful portrait is a stark reminder that music is fundamentally the expression of human life in sound.

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Carducci Quartet

Described by The Strad as presenting "a masterclass in unanimity of musical purpose, in which severity could melt seamlessly into charm, and drama into geniality", the award-winning **Carducci Quartet** is internationally acclaimed as one of the most accomplished and versatile ensembles of today. Not only mastering the core repertoire, the quartet presents a selection of new works each season and diversifies further with programmes of film music, pop, folk and rock, as well as concerts of music and spoken word. Founded in 1997, the ensemble was a prize winner at numerous international competitions, including the Concert Artists Guild International Competition, and Finland's Kuhmo International Chamber Music Competition.

The Carducci Quartet is appearing at prestigious venues across the globe including the Barbican, Cadogan Hall, Southbank Centre, Royal Albert Hall and Wigmore Hall,

London; National Concert Hall, Dublin; Tivoli Concert Hall, Copenhagen; The Frick Collection and Carnegie Hall, New York; Library of Congress and John. F Kennedy Center, Washington D.C.; St Lawrence Center for the Arts, Toronto; Muziekcentrum De Bijloke, Ghent; and Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. Festival residencies include Cheltenham, Ryedale, Lichfield, Presteigne, Kilkenny, Canterbury, Snape Proms, and West Cork.

Recent highlights include a televised performance at the 2023 BBC Proms (Royal Albert Hall) with Voces8, a collaboration with Roderick Williams to close the Aldeburgh Festival, and a series of concerts across the UK with jazz singer Jacqui Dankworth. The 2023/2024 season will include an evening of concerts at London's Southbank Centre celebrating composer Peter Gregson; returns to the Wigmore Hall in London and National Concert Hall Dublin; and a tour to Italy.

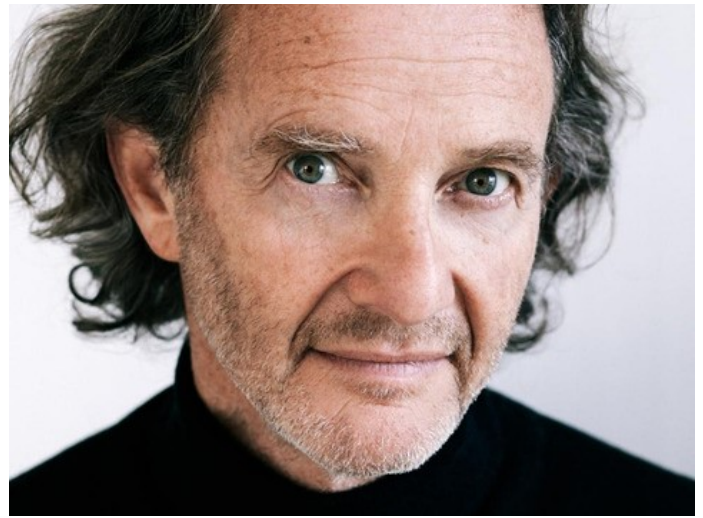
In 2016, they took home a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for their project, *Shostakovich 15*, an immense cycle of Shostakovich's Quartets performed across the UK, North, and South America with a marathon one-day cycle hosted by Shakespeare's Globe, London. The project was accompanied by a recording of the 4th, 8th, and 11th Quartets to which they added a further volume in Spring 2019 of the 1st, 2nd, and 7th Quartets, acclaimed by Gramophone Magazine for its '...athletic, upfront performances, clear in texture, forthright in tone and bold in articulation'. The Carduccis returned to the composer in 2022, with performances at the Barbican and Wigmore Hall in London, residencies at Kilkenny and Canterbury Festivals, and a third recording presenting the 9th and 15th Quartets.

In 2015 they curated projects around Philip Glass and Steve Reich as part of the Royal Philharmonic Society Award winning *Minimalism Unwrapped* at Kings Place in London. Their recording of the Philip Glass Quartets, for Naxos, has reached over 6 million plays on Spotify.

Education work is an important element of the Carducci Quartet's work, earning them a place on the Royal Philharmonic Society Award shortlist for their family concert *Getting the Quartet Bug!*. The Carducci Music Trust was set up to support their work in schools and with young musicians. They also perform a number of school concerts each year supported by the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust.

Anton Lesser

Anton Lesser is a prolific stage actor. His role in *The Two Popes* at The Rose Theatre Kingston stands among his numerous theatre



credits including popular RSC productions: *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Plantagenets*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*. He is well known for his role of Thomas More in *Wolf Hall* which earned him a BAFTA nomination for Best Supporting Actor.

No stranger to a fantasy series, he can be seen in *Game of Thrones* as Qyburn and has voiced the role of Dr John Hathaway in *The Sandman* podcast series. Other credits include Harold Macmillan in Netflix's *The Crown*, *Killing Eve*, *Endeavour*, *1899* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*.

Joining his screen credits, Anton is a wonderful reader and has narrated numerous audio projects including poetry and works by Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde – he has also worked extensively with the BBC for their Radio dramas *Home Front*, *An Unlikely Pilgrimage* and *Terry Pratchett* as well as many others.

Anton is currently starring as Major Partagaz in *Andor* on Disney+ as well as the BBC Drama series *Better* in which he plays the role of Vernon.

info@turnersims.co.uk

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