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Classical Music

Concert programme

**Quatuor Diotima
Boulez Anniversary
Concert**

Sun 18 May 7.30pm

Milton Court Concert Hall

Important information



When does the concert start and finish?

The concert begins at 7.30pm and finishes at about 9.30pm, with a 20-minute interval.



I'm running late!

Latecomers will be admitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



Please ...

Switch any watch alarms and mobile phones to silent during the performance.



Please don't ...

Take photos or recordings during the performance – save it for the curtain call.



Use a hearing aid?

Please see a member of staff to assist you.



Need a break?

You can leave at any time and be readmitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



Looking for refreshments?

Bars are located on Levels -1, G and 1.



Looking for the toilets?

The nearest toilets, including accessible toilets, are located on Levels -1, G and 2.



Carrying bags and coats?

Drop them off at our free cloak room on Level -1.

Quatuor Diotima

Boulez Anniversary Concert

Sun 18 May 7.30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

Quatuor Diotima

Johann Sebastian Bach 'Contrapunctus I'
from *The Art of Fugue*

Pierre Boulez Ia & Ib from *Livre pour quatuor*

Johann Sebastian Bach 'Contrapunctus IX'
from *The Art of Fugue*

Pierre Boulez II from *Livre pour quatuor*

Anton Webern String Quartet Op 28

- 1 Mässig
- 2 Gemächlich
- 3 Sehr fließend

Pierre Boulez III a-b-c from *Livre pour quatuor*

Johann Sebastian Bach 'Contrapunctus XVIII'
from *The Art of Fugue*

Interval 20 minutes

Claude Debussy String Quartet in G minor

- 1 Animé et très décidé
- 2 Assez vif et bien rythmé
- 3 Andantino, doucement expressif
- 4 Très modéré – Très animé

Produced by the Barbican
Part of Boulez 100

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The Quatuor Diotima makes its debut here at Milton Court with a typically radical mash-up of music ancient and modern, including a performance of Boulez's groundbreaking *Livre pour quatuor*, its personal contribution to the composer's centenary celebrations.

It's only fitting that a concert celebrating the meticulously crafted music of Pierre Boulez should itself contain a web of intricate interconnections linking what might appear disparate works. From JS Bach – as both composer and musical cipher – through to all-pervasive themes and music left tantalisingly incomplete, threads of ideas weave their way through the four pieces that comprise tonight's programme.

The Art of Fugue was among JS Bach's final creations, one of a clutch of works from the composer's last decade often viewed as a self-conscious summation of his craft. In the case of *The Art of Fugue*, on display are the composer's visionary abilities in weaving complex textures and intense emotional expression out of a single musical theme – heard at the very start of tonight's austere opening *Contrapunctus I*. That simple theme will pile up in multiple layers on top of itself, and travel through all manner of transformations and adaptations, across the course of the piece's 14 fugues and four canons. Tonight's second excerpt – *Contrapunctus IX* – introduces a quicker new melody, only returning to the original, all-pervasive theme later, now stretched even broader than previously. It's little wonder that *The Art of Fugue* has generated something of a visionary or even mystical aura, partly down to its esoteric, almost mathematical musical intricacies. Building on that is the fact that Bach specified no particular instrumentation (might this be music purely for the mind?) and is said to have died partway through writing the work's

final fugue, *Contrapunctus XVIII* (a claim that's now been largely debunked, though that fugue remains unfinished). Nonetheless, he managed to insert his own name – transformed into the notes B flat-A-C-B natural, according to German naming conventions – as one of that final fugue's three themes, even if the piece suddenly breaks off just as those three themes are finally being woven together.

Though it was one of Pierre Boulez's earliest works – he wrote most of it in 1948–9 – the *Livre pour quatuor* was also left effectively incomplete when the composer died in 2016. He'd finished four of its planned six movements in the 1940s, added a fifth in 1959, and – after substantial collaboration with tonight's musicians, the Quatuor Diotima, between 2002 and 2012 – left sketches for the *Livre's* missing fourth movement that were reconstructed by fellow composer Philippe Manoury and musicologist Jean-Louis Leleu in 2018. In any case, Boulez had long conceived the *Livre pour quatuor* as a 'modular' work, one in which performers would select which sections they'd play and in what order (tonight, we'll hear the first, second and third movements). His inspiration in that regard was the monumental (and also unfinished) *Le Livre* by poet Stéphane Mallarmé, a vast collection of detachable pages intended to reveal what the writer described as 'all existing relations between everything'. Boulez's *Livre pour quatuor* contains exceptionally complex, virtuosic music that harnesses a bewildering variety of playing techniques – some conventional, others more outlandish. It also represents a characteristically compelling mix of fastidious musical organisation – influenced by the rigorous processes of Anton Webern, whose super-compact String Quartet we'll turn to next – with a deep sensuality, albeit of a raw, volatile kind.

'I had the feeling that when the 12 notes have all been played, the piece is over.' That was Webern discussing the extreme brevity of his 1913 *Bagatelles* for string quartet, but similar ideas hold true for his almost equally concise String Quartet, premiered in 1938. The 12 notes to which he refers are the 12 pitches found in a chromatic scale in traditional

classical music, and while Bach based his entire *Art of Fugue* around a single theme, Webern similarly derives all of the sparse, aphoristic material of his Quartet from a single ordering of those 12 notes. Furthermore, that ordering reuses Bach's name transformed into musical pitches – B flat-A-C-B natural, the same notes that Bach himself employed – as its starting point. Webern deploys his ordering with uncompromising rigour across the Quartet's three brief movements: first a theme and variations, second a tiny scherzo, and a complex double fugue (surely another Bach reference) as its finale.

If Webern inspired the austerer side of Boulez's strictly structured music, then there are surely parallels between the later composer's gritty sensuality and the more overtly voluptuous music of his earlier compatriot Claude Debussy. His sole String Quartet comes from 1893, just a year before the work that would encapsulate the composer's elusive, subtly shaded style – the orchestral *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* – and change European music in the process. The Ysaÿe Quartet gave the work's premiere in Paris on 29 December 1893, to decidedly mixed responses: many found the music unforgivably radical and revolutionary for its time. That might surprise us more than 130 years later, since in many ways it's a work that relies on tried and tested ideas from the past – not least a 'motto' theme, which (like Bach's fugue subject and Webern's note ordering) pervades (almost) the entire work. That motto theme is announced with bristling rhythmic confidence at the assertive first movement's opening, and returns in modified form as the mischievous viola melody that chugs its way through the second-movement scherzo. Debussy veers away from the theme in his deeply sensuous, trance-like slow third movement, though it returns in several different guises in his free-flowing finale, a quicksilver, scampering reimagining ultimately propelling the piece to its thrilling, bright conclusion.

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Quatuor Diotima

Yun-Peng Zhao, Léo Marillier violin

Franck Chevalier viola

Alexis Descharmes cello

The Quatuor Diotima is one of the most in-demand chamber ensembles in the world; it was formed in 1996 by graduates of the Paris Conservatoire.

The quartet's name evokes a double musical significance: Diotima being the name of the protagonist's lover in *Hyperion* – Friedrich Hölderlin's great Romantic novel – and a rallying cry for the music of our time, courtesy of Luigi Nono's groundbreaking quartet *Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima*.

The Quatuor Diotima has collaborated closely with several of the greatest composers of the late 20th century, notably Pierre Boulez and Helmut Lachenmann. It also regularly commissions music from leading contemporary composers, including Toshio Hosokawa, Miroslav Srnka, Alberto Posadas, Mauro Lanza, Gérard Pesson, Rebecca Saunders and Tristan Murail. Its work with new music helps to enrich its performances of 19th- and 20th-century masterpieces.

Its award-winning discography includes a cycle of Bartók quartets, a complete survey of music of the Second Viennese School and albums of music by Gérard Pesson, Enno Poppe, Stefano Gervasoni and Mauricio

Sotelo (all Naïve). It marked Ligeti's centenary in 2023 with a critically acclaimed album, its first on Pentatone, following this with a recording of music by Bruckner and Klose and, most recently, Boulez's *Livre pour quatuor*.

The Diotima Quartet was the first quartet-in-residence at Radio France (2019–21); it has since found a new home in the Grand Est region, sharing strong cultural links with Germany and Switzerland. This residency allows the quartet to develop its Academy in partnership with the Cité Musicale-Metz, which includes bringing together young composers and string quartets from all over the world, a chamber music series in Strasbourg and an educational residency at the École Nationale de Lutherie in Mirecourt.

Teaching forms an important strand of the quartet's activities, and it was recently an Associate Artist at the Aix-en-Provence Festival Academy and artist-in-residence at the University of Chicago.

Highlights of this season include being artist-in-residence with the Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne; performing works by Lachenmann in Hamburg, Berlin and Heidelberg; and a tour of the USA. It also returns to the Vienna Konzerthaus, Pierre Boulez Saal Berlin, Copenhagen, Rome, Lugano, Dortmund and Kassel, as well as making debuts here at the Barbican Centre and the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

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Shostakovich Quartets: Intimate Portraits A series with the Carducci Quartet **Part 5** Thu 29 May, Milton Court



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Ligeti Quartet: Nuc Sat 21 Jun, Cinema 1



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