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Classical Music

Concert programme

**Carducci Quartet:
Shostakovich
Quartets, Part 5**

Thu 29 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, or during the interval.



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 G, 1 and 2.



Carrying bags and coats?

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

Shostakovich Quartets: Intimate Portraits, Part 5

A series with the Carducci Quartet

Thu 29 May 7.30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

Carducci Quartet **Kyan Quartet**

Dmitri Shostakovich String Quartet No 10 (Carducci Quartet)

- 1 Andante
- 2 Allegretto furioso
- 3 Adagio –
- 4 Allegretto

String Quartet No 7 (Kyan Quartet)

- 1 Allegretto –
- 2 Lento –
- 3 Allegro – Allegretto

Interval 20 minutes

String Quartet No 15 (Carducci Quartet)

- 1 Elegy: Adagio –
- 2 Serenade: Adagio –
- 3 Intermezzo: Adagio –
- 4 Nocturne: Adagio –
- 5 Funeral March: Adagio molto –
- 6 Epilogue: Adagio

Produced by the Barbican

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Tonight, the Carducci Quartet concludes its exploration of the quartets of Shostakovich in this anniversary celebration. Once again, it's joined by the up-and-coming Kyan Quartet in a programme that takes us from the concision of No 7, via the symphonic dimensions of No 10, culminating in the extraordinary bleakness of the 15th Quartet, a fitting farewell to a genre Shostakovich had made so much his own.

Shostakovich's Ninth and 10th Quartets were products of a burst of activity in 1964, which he described to his friend Isaak Glikman as 'creative diarrhoea'. Part of the credit for this new-found fluency goes to the urge to surpass his colleague and disciple Mieczyslaw Weinberg, who had reached his Ninth Quartet the previous year, and it is to Weinberg that No 10 is dedicated. The work was premiered, along with No 9, by the Beethoven Quartet on 20 November 1964.

Although both Nos 9 and 10 are large-scale, emotionally wide-ranging works and may be counted among Shostakovich's 'symphonic' quartets, they are very different in design. Where the five movements of the Ninth are weighted towards its colossal summatory finale, the 10th is more Classically balanced in its four-movement layout. It is almost as if Shostakovich had chosen to demonstrate what could still be done within the standard mould, at a time when many younger Soviet composers were feasting on the newly available delicacies of Western modernism.

As in the Ninth Quartet, the gently paced first movement has a guarded, watchful feel, constantly seeking refuge in the shelter of plagal cadences. Towards the end, the viola's *sul ponticello* triplets (bowed close to the bridge of the instrument) register as a shiver of anticipation. Then, as if unleashing forces the first movement had not dared to confront, the second is an outpouring of venom unparalleled in Shostakovich's quartets, headed Allegretto furioso and with a substantial passage of unison writing for the two violins. The shock of this outburst is to some extent absorbed by the lamenting passacaglia slow movement, which leads without a break into an initially chugging, then sardonic finale that will eventually recall both the passacaglia and first-movement themes, maintaining emotional ambivalence up to the last page.

The Seventh and Eighth Quartets form another pair, both being composed in 1960. No 7 followed a period of hospital treatment for a mysterious muscular weakness in Shostakovich's right hand (much later diagnosed as motor neurone disease). The Beethoven Quartet gave the premiere in Leningrad on 15 May, and it was during the rehearsals that the composer first disclosed his intention to go on to complete a cycle of 24 quartets in all the major and minor keys.

He had begun work the previous summer, and the Seventh Quartet carries a dedication to the memory of his first wife, Nina Varzar, whose 50th birthday would have fallen in May 1959. The three movements play without a break and are exceptionally compact, making this, at around 12 minutes, the shortest of the entire cycle. As was gradually becoming the norm for his quartets, the overall structure is strongly end-weighted, the first two movements each having a provisional feel and the finale reworking aspects of both, along with transformations of its own initial driving fugue-scherzo. All these elements are finally reconciled in the melancholy muted waltz that concludes the work.

An autobiographical element of loss, which would come even more to the fore in the

Eighth Quartet, is readable in the frequent 'absence' of one or more instruments from the texture, and it is reinforced by what seem to be allusions to works associated with times of special intensity during the years of Shostakovich's marriage. These ideas alternate with themes and motifs that seem to distil the essence of Shostakovich's musical personality, such as the short-short-long rhythms and repeated notes at the opening, and the four-note descent on the viola that links the second and third movements – as meaningful, yet inscrutable, as Easter Island statues.

Shortly after completing his 14th Quartet in April 1973, Shostakovich travelled for the third and last time to the United States, ostensibly to receive an honorary doctorate from Northwestern University, but also to consult American doctors, who established that he was suffering from motor neurone disease. By this time he was also under treatment for lung cancer, which would be the eventual cause of his death. His last string quartet, the 15th, is one of only three to carry no dedication, but it is often understood as a kind of requiem for the composer himself.

Between the composition of the quartet and its premiere, the cellist of the Beethoven Quartet, Sergey Shirinsky, died unexpectedly. The privilege of premiering the work, on 15 November 1974, fell to the young Leningrad-based Taneyev Quartet.

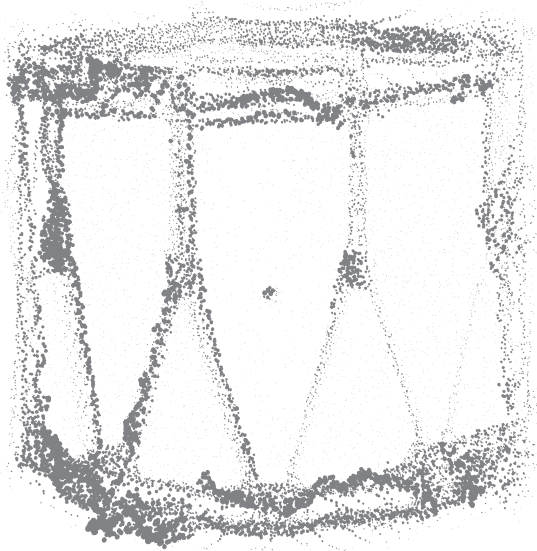
The six movements are all in the key of E flat minor, whose associations with mysterious and oppressive moods feature prominently in Russian operas and symphonies. All six movements are in the same adagio tempo, except for the Funeral March (and its echoes in the Epilogue) which is even slower. This, then, is a compositional *tour de force*, a 'Symphony in Black', as it were (the obverse of Whistler's *Symphony in White* paintings). It is an awesomely depressed work, whose only consolation, perhaps, is in showing that is possible to stare into the void without being engulfed by it.

Typically for late Shostakovich, the musical surface is replete with cryptic

allusions, beginning with the opening fugal idea that reimagines Schubert's famous 'Death and the Maiden' theme, grafting onto it the melodic shape from the opening of the 1963 First Cello Concerto by Shostakovich's favourite pupil, Boris Tishchenko. Fyodor Druzhinin, violist at the time in the Beethoven Quartet, remembered the composer's recommendation for the first movement: 'Play it so that flies drop dead in mid-air, and the audience starts leaving the hall from sheer boredom.'

Stark crescendos and ripping pizzicatos usher in the Serenade – clearly more of an anti-Serenade, in the manner of Shostakovich's piano *Aphorisms* of the 1920s – while the innocently titled Intermezzo is an agonised brainstorm for the first violin, interspersed with anguished memories of the Serenade. The muted Nocturne brings some brief glimpses of warmth, but such moments are undetectable in the Funeral March, and the Epilogue can do no more than thumb disconsolately through the album leaves of a damaged life.

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Carducci Quartet

Matthew Denton, Michelle Fleming violin
Eoin Schmidt-Martin viola
Emma Denton cello

The award-winning Carducci Quartet is internationally acclaimed as one of the most accomplished and versatile ensembles of today. In addition to mastering the core repertoire, each season the quartet presents a selection of new works and diversifies further with programmes of film music, pop, folk and rock, as well as concerts of music

and spoken word. The group was founded in 1997 and 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 regularly appears at prestigious venues across the world, including the Barbican, Cadogan Hall, Southbank Centre, Royal Albert Hall and Wigmore Hall; 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 DC; St Lawrence Center for the Arts, Toronto; Muziekcentrum De Bijloke, Ghent; and Amsterdam Concertgebouw. The quartet has also held residencies at the Cheltenham, Ryedale, Aldeburgh, Lichfield, Presteigne, Kilkenny, Canterbury and West Cork festivals.

The music of Shostakovich has always been a particular point of focus for the quartet. In 2016 it won a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for its project, Shostakovich15, performing Shostakovich's quartets across the UK and North and South America, including a marathon one-day cycle hosted by Shakespeare's Globe here in London. The project was accompanied by recordings of the Fourth, Eighth and 11th Quartets, with subsequent releases of the First, Second and Seventh Quartets (2019) and Ninth and 15th Quartets (2024). Recent projects have included 'Shostakovich's Letters' with actor Anton Lesser – a programme based around translations of texts from the composer himself alongside his music.

In 2015 the quartet curated projects around Philip Glass and Steve Reich as part of the Royal Philharmonic Society Award-winning 'Minimalism Unwrapped' at Kings Place. Its recording of the Philip Glass quartets, for Naxos, has reached over 21 million plays on Spotify. The quartet will be marking both composers' 90th birthdays with a major project during the 2026/27 season.

Highlights of this season include the current 'Intimate Portraits' series, which culminates in tonight's concert, returns to the Two Moors and Leicester festivals, and Wigmore Hall and collaborations with Charles Owen, Emma Johnson, Julian Bliss, Guy Johnston, and Jacqui Dankworth.

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

Kyan Quartet

Naomi Warburton, Sydney Mariano violin

Wanshu Qiu viola

Simon Guémy cello

Prizewinners of the 2024 Royal Over-Seas League competition and 2025 City Music Foundation artists, the award-winning Kyan Quartet consists of four exceptional musicians from the UK, US, China and France. The quartet was formed in 2020 and has since built a busy international career, having performed across Europe and Asia in venues including Wigmore Hall, St Martin-in-the-Fields, Beethoven-Haus Chamber Music Hall, Shanghai Opera House and Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra Hall.

As Tunnell Trust award holders, the quartet toured across Scotland last month. Tonight is the first of three concerts with the Carducci Quartet in their Barbican Shostakovich cycle project. Other forthcoming highlights include debuts at St John's Smith Square, Barnes Music Society and Canterbury Music Club. The quartet also continues its ongoing collaboration with Ahmed Dickinson, returning to Conway Hall this

November for a programme of guitar quintets. The quartet is grateful to be supported by Le Dimore del Quartetto.

The Kyan Quartet has held residencies with the Britten Pears Young Artist Programme and the South Downs Summer Music International Festival, and attended prestigious courses, including the International Beethoven Masterclass in Bonn, Jeunesses Musicales Deutschland's 68th International Chamber Music Campus and Chamber Studio's inaugural Hans Keller Forum. Through these it has received coaching from all members of the Belcea Quartet, Heime Müller, John Myerscough, Jana Kuss, Alasdair Beatson and Péter Nagy. The quartet has also been coached by members of the Carducci, Doric, Heath, Jerusalem and Pavel Haas quartets. It is currently mentored at the Mozarteum University by Cibrán Sierra Vazquez, Rainer Schmidt and William Coleman.

Widening musical participation and access is central to the quartet's artistic mission. It is a Live Music Now artist, sharing its love of participatory music-making in care homes and SEND schools. The quartet also gives masterclasses and works with young



© Benjamin Ealovega

composers at the Junior Royal Academy of Music. As the 2022/23 fellows of the Open Academy/Wigmore Hall Learning Programme, it appeared regularly on the Wigmore Hall stage and in community settings, sharing music with families, young children and those living with dementia. A particular highlight was leading workshops across six primary schools in Tower Hamlets, in partnership with Spitalfields Music.

The Kyan Quartet is also a keen champion of new music. It has given Wigmore premieres of commissioned pieces by Florence Anna Maunders and Zhenyan Li, and performed *Symphony for String Quartet and Forest* by Jacob Fitzgerald at the 2022 Timber Festival, featuring 200 school children singing alongside the quartet. It collaborated with Cem Güven to record his 2023 quartet *Atmospheric Manipulations*, and will feature on Ben Nobuto's forthcoming debut album.

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Ligeti Quartet: Nuc
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