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Classical Music

Concert programme

**Carducci Quartet:
Shostakovich
Quartets, Part 2**

Fri 28 Feb 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 9.15pm, 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 use our induction loop – just switch your hearing aid to T setting on entering the hall.



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 2

A series with the Carducci Quartet

Fri 28 Feb 7.30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

Carducci Quartet

Dmitri Shostakovich String Quartet No 12

- 1 Moderato
- 2 Moderato

String Quartet No 6

- 1 Allegretto
- 2 Moderato con moto
- 3 Lento
- 4 Lento – Allegro

Interval 20 minutes

Sofia Guibaidulina *Reflections on the Theme B-A-C-H*

Dmitri Shostakovich String Quartet No 3

- 1 Allegretto
- 2 Moderato con moto
- 3 Allegro non troppo
- 4 Adagio
- 5 Moderato

Produced by the Barbican

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The Carducci Quartet continues its exploration of the quartets of Shostakovich, as we mark 50 years since his death. Nos 3, 6 and 12 could not be more different. Tonight they're paired with a work by Sofia Gubaidulina – 93 years young – whom Shostakovich inspired while she was still a student.

The last 10 years of Shostakovich's life were shadowed by multiple infirmities. He suffered heart attacks in 1966 and 1971. In 1967 he broke his right leg in a fall, as a consequence of a degenerative condition that would eventually be diagnosed as motor neurone disease. More falls and breakages would follow, and eventually he succumbed to lung cancer. These misfortunes necessitated long periods of inactivity in hospitals and sanatoria, during which, not surprisingly, his thoughts turned increasingly to the topic of mortality.

This was also the time when Shostakovich began using 12-note themes (using all 12 notes of the chromatic scale without repetition). Like Benjamin Britten, his friend since 1960, he drew not on Schoenberg's rigorous technique but rather on the historical symbolism of such themes as some kind of absolute, often inimical force, such as the Faustian lust for knowledge, as in Liszt's *Faust Symphony*, Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* and Berg's *Wozzeck*. In Shostakovich's case, the prime associative field is Death, as in, especially, his 14th Symphony, written in 1969.

The 12th Quartet – composed in early 1968 and dedicated to Dmitri Tsiganov, first violin in the Beethoven Quartet – opens with one such theme, on solo cello. Some 25 minutes later, the concluding bars will proclaim an unequivocal D flat major in a fast, energetic *fortissimo* for all four instruments. To conclude that the entire work is a progression from Death to Life, symbolised by the move from atonality to tonality, would be tempting. At any rate, its two movements certainly

present a journey of some kind: from torpor to defiance, from provisionality to assertion.

The Sixth Quartet (1956) could hardly be more different, both from the 12th and from its own predecessors. It returns not only to the 'classical' four-movement mould of Quartets Nos 1, 2 and 4, but also to the superficially innocent tone of No 1. Why such apparent regression? It could be that Shostakovich felt he had given full vent to the tragic-symphonic manner in his preceding four quartets and in his Symphonies Nos 4 to 10, and that he was simply ready for a change. It could be that the quartet's pacific tone was intended to chime with the Soviet Union's official international stance in the early Cold War years as a peace-loving nation. It could be that the patent hypocrisy of that stance is reflected in the sense of uneasy watchfulness that increasingly makes itself felt beneath its apparently benign surfaces. It could even be that given that Shostakovich composed the piece during his honeymoon with his second wife, its wanly smiling quality reflecting his nervous wish to believe in the possibility of domestic bliss. Or all of the above.

None of these hypotheses can be proved or disproved. But the problem of tone will not go away. One of the quartet's most unsettling features is the whimsical, yawning cadence that rounds off each movement. For this, there's at least one plausible reading: at the tense high-point in the 'yawn' is a vertical appearance (ie in harmony rather than melody) of Shostakovich's musical signature – the notes D, E flat (in German nomenclature S), C, B (in German H), representing the German transliteration of his initials: D for Dmitrij, SCH for Schostakowitsch. In effect, this strange-yet-familiar cadence serves as a commentary on everything previously heard, making it seem that the nervy simplicity of the first movement, the waltz-like, hushed second, the sorrowful passacaglia slow movement, or the equivocating finale were, after all, only 'once upon a time'. This is 'me', but in masked, not defiant mode.

Sofia Gubaidulina is a representative of the generation of composers born in the early 1930s who were determined to modernise Soviet music in the post-Stalin era. She and Shostakovich had little contact, but in 1959, at the time of her postgraduate examinations, he famously encouraged her

to pursue the path that others had deemed 'mistaken'. Her *Reflections on the theme B-A-C-H* is one of 10 pieces commissioned by the Brentano Quartet to mark its 10th anniversary in 2002, the brief being to create a companion piece to a movement from *The Art of Fugue*. She chose the unfinished concluding fugue, one of whose three subjects is the German version of the letters of Bach's surname, overlaying it with anguished 'reflections' of her own.

In the second half of Shostakovich's composing career, the string quartet gradually took over from the symphony as his chief preoccupation in instrumental composition, and, paradoxically, as the chief embodiment of symphonic range and concentration. The exchange starts to become clear with the Third Quartet, which was composed in 1946, a year after the surprisingly lightweight Ninth Symphony.

Like the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies, this quartet is in five movements. The opening Allegretto shares its sad-clown cheekiness with the finale of the Ninth Symphony, though it is the intense, contrapuntally virtuosic development section, rather than the apparent flippancy of the opening and conclusion, that sets the tone for what is to come. Two substitute scherzos are then dominated by images of, respectively, grotesquerie and brutality. In this sense they are close cousins of the corresponding movements of the Eighth Symphony. So, too, is the slow fourth movement, which absorbs the shock of their impact. The concluding Moderato recalls the marionettish character of the opening movement, as though trying to recapture gaiety in the midst of tragedy. The final bars are haunted and desolate.

The Third Quartet was first performed on 16 December 1946, in an atmosphere of crisis unleashed a few months earlier by a resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party directed against writers and literary journals. That crisis would only fully engulf Shostakovich and other composers early in 1948, when the Third Quartet joined the notorious list of works 'not recommended for performance': one reason, no doubt, why Shostakovich referred to it ever after with special pride.

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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, 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.

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Shostakovich Quartets: Intimate Portraits A series with the Carducci Quartet

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Part 4

Tue 29 Apr, Milton Court

Part 5

Thu 29 May, Milton Court



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