

BRODSKY QUARTET

📅 **Wednesday 17 July** 🕒 **3pm – 5pm**

📍 **St John's Church**

Krysia Osostowicz Violin
Ian Belton Violin
Paul Cassidy Viola
Jaqueline Thomas Cello

Since forming in 1972, the Brodsky Quartet have performed over 3,500 concerts on the major stages of the world and have released more than 70 recordings. A natural curiosity and desire to explore have propelled the group in a number of artistic directions and continue to ensure them not only a prominent presence on the international chamber music scene, but also a rich and varied musical existence. Their energy and craftsmanship have attracted awards and accolades worldwide, while their ongoing educational work provides a vehicle to pass on experience and stay in touch with the next generation.

3 Pieces for String Quartet

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Written in 1914, these concentrated studies focus on particular textures and moods, constructed from short motifs, juxtaposed or layered, and repeated in varying combinations.

The fast, incisive first piece plays out the shifting relationships between layers of material almost like a mechanism which Stravinsky has wound up and let go.

No. 2, Stravinsky later said, was inspired by seeing the clown Little Tich performing in London. Jerky, spasmodic rhythms are constantly interrupted by subversive asides – silvery little fanfares in harmonics, gentle arpeggio figures or rough, aggressive gestures.

Stravinsky was particularly proud of the last piece, with its solemn liturgical flavour suggesting Russian Orthodox chant.

Polomka Quartet

Isidora Žebeljan (1967-2020)

Isidora Žebeljan studied composition at the Faculty of Music in her native Belgrade, returning as Professor of Composition in 2002.

Commissioned by the University of Kent, *Polomka Quartet* is dedicated to the Brodsky Quartet, who gave the premiere in Canterbury in 2009. It takes its name from what Žebeljan described as 'a traditional Serbian break-dance', combining small, simple steps with complex body-movements. The piece draws on the rhythms typical of Balkan folk music, creating what Žebeljan came to think of as 'a dance of an imaginary people, in a non-existent region'.

String Quartet No. 1

1. Andante sostenuto/allegro vivo; 2. Allegretto con slancio; 3. Andante calmo; 4. Molto vivace

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Britten wrote his String Quartet No. 1 in the summer of 1941, during his three-year stay in America. It was commissioned by, and dedicated to, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, one of the twentieth century's great patrons of chamber music.

Ethereally high-lying music for the upper three instruments introduces the first movement, with the cello's pizzicato phrases far below. A drumming rhythmic figure for all four instruments then kick-starts the faster music forming the main part of the movement.

The second movement is propelled by a clipped rhythmic energy (*con slancio* = 'with impetus'). Sporadic triplet figures become increasingly insistent, eventually taking over completely. The process then goes into reverse, eventually fading to nothing – except for an impudent final flourish.

From its simple opening, the third movement gradually accumulates weight and intensity. The cello introduces a more rhetorical note, which soon spreads to the rest of the ensemble. After a powerful climax, the music ends in the calm where it began.



The finale's defiant breeziness is typical of the young Britten. A galloping triplet figure provides a secondary source of energy, returning as the music hurtles towards its exuberant ending.

Two Pieces for string quartet (Elegy and Polka)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Shostakovich wrote these two pieces – transcriptions of numbers from two of his theatre scores – during the night of 31 October and 1 November 1931. He was in Georgia on a two-month 'working holiday', and the pieces are dedicated to the Vuillaume Quartet, a touring Ukrainian ensemble who happened to be staying in the same hotel. Shostakovich had a score and set of parts ready to present to the quartet at 6 o'clock in the morning just before they were due to leave.

The Elegy is a transcription of Katerina's aria 'The Foal runs after the Filly', from Act 1 of the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, on which Shostakovich was then working. The Polka is the best-known number from his ballet *The Golden Age*, first staged in Leningrad in October 1930, concerning the adventures of a Soviet football team playing an international fixture in the West.

Dark Velvet

Isidora Žebeljan

Subtitled 'In memory of Gustav Mahler', *Dark Velvet* was written in 2006, originally for solo piano. Žebeljan herself gave the first performance in Belgrade in December that year. She made this string quartet transcription specially for the Brodsky Quartet.

String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10

1. Animé et très décidé; 2. Assez vif et bien rythmé; 3. Andantino doucement expressif; 4. Très modéré – très mouvementé et avec passion.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Debussy's String Quartet, of 1893, owes something to the example of César Franck, with whom he had a brief, unsatisfactory encounter while studying at the Paris Conservatoire, but who wrote the most notable French string quartet before Debussy's. Debussy's attitude to Franck was to remain ambivalent. But he was attracted to Franck's concept of cyclic form – in which the separate movements of a large-scale work are unified by continual transformations of a single theme – leaving its mark on his own Quartet.

The sonorous theme at the start begins to undergo subtle changes almost immediately. After the vigorous opening section, it appears on the cello, underpinning the first violin's gentle and expressive second theme, and it becomes the expansive theme for the first violin towards the end of the movement, shortly after the return of the opening music.

In the second movement, the theme appears first as a sinuous repeated figure on the viola, threading its way through a pizzicato texture that suggests the Javanese gamelan music which Debussy heard at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889. The repeated figure is later transformed into the broad song-like theme at the centre of the movement.

The slow movement explores a world of half-light and melancholy sweetness, out of which the finale slowly emerges, then gathers momentum for the passionately vigorous main part of the movement. The Quartet reaches its tumultuous conclusion with Debussy still finding new perspectives on its main theme.