

YORK
EARLY MUSIC
CHRISTMAS
FESTIVAL
2025

Chiaroscuro Quartet
&
Consone Quartet

National Centre for Early Music
Sunday 7 December 6.30pm

Chiaroscuro Quartet

Alina Ibragimova *violin*

Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux *violin*

Emilie Hörnlund *viola*

Claire Thirion *cello*

Consone Quartet

Agata Daraškaitė *violin*

Magdalena Loth-Hill *violin*

Elitsa Bogdanova *viola*

George Ross *cello*

String Quartet in G major, op. 33 no. 5

Franz Joseph Haydn 1732-1809

Vivace assai

Largo cantabile

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale: Allegretto

String Quartet in D major, op. 18 no. 3

Ludwig van Beethoven 1770-1827

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro

Presto

INTERVAL

Octet in E flat major, op. 20

Felix Mendelssohn 1809-47

Allegro moderato ma con fuoco

Andante

Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo

Presto

String Quartet in G major, op. 33 no. 5

Haydn

Vivace assai

Largo cantabile

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale: Allegretto

Haydn famously proclaimed to subscribers that his opus 33 string quartets of 1781 were written 'in a completely new and special way, for I haven't composed any for ten years'. It's easy to dismiss this as sales talk. But there *are* new features in opus 33. Compared with the opus 20 quartets of 1772, opus 33 is more popular in tone, with a livelier sense of rhythm that Haydn had honed in his comic operas. Ideas grow inevitably out of each other as the instruments move fluidly between theme and accompaniment. Opus 33 neatly illustrates Goethe's description of the string quartet as 'a conversation between four intelligent people'.

The opening *Vivace assai* begins, paradoxically, with a closing gesture: a *galant* cadence whose suggestion of a bow or curtsy prompted the nickname 'How-do-you-do?'. This initiates a movement of almost symphonic boldness and drive, replete with orchestral-style double stopping. Unusually in the opus 33 quartets, there is also a distinct second theme, a lyrical violin melody of Mozartian grace and poise.

In the G minor *Largo* the first violin sings out its soul like some tragic operatic heroine. At the end Haydn deflates the tragic mood with a single pizzicato twang: a preparation, perhaps, for the *Scherzo*, as he labelled all the minuets in opus 33. Here Haydn gleefully wrong-foots the listener with displaced accents, then inserts a pause just when we seem to have found our bearings. As if to make amends, the Trio is almost exaggeratedly demure. Simplicity is also the keynote of the *Finale*, a set of three decorative variations on a lilting siciliano tune. Two years later Mozart took up Haydn's idea of a variation finale in siciliano rhythm and gave it a far more troubled cast in his D minor Quartet, K421.

String Quartet in D major, op. 18 no. 3

Beethoven

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro

Presto

The writing of string quartets was a daunting proposition for any young composer working in Vienna in the 1790s. Between them Haydn and Mozart had raised the

quartet to a supreme vehicle for subtle musical discourse. Not surprisingly, Beethoven was careful to establish his credentials as a composer for the piano before taking up the challenge in 1798. When the six quartets of opus 18 appeared in 1801, reactions were mainly enthusiastic though, true to form, conservative-minded critics found the music harsh and 'difficult' – an astonishing reaction to us today!

Although published as no. 3, the D major Quartet, completed early in 1799, was the first to be composed. Apart from the boisterous finale it is the quietest and most lyrical of opus 18, especially in its leisurely first movement. The magical opening – a sinuous, almost improvisatory violin melody against slowly shifting harmonies – may have been inspired by Haydn's 'Sunrise' Quartet, op. 76 no. 4.

In the *Andante con moto* the solemn main theme, shared between the two violins, is offset by a dainty scherzando theme. Beethoven artfully fuses the movement's serious and playful aspects in the widely modulating development. Somewhere between a minuet and a scherzo, the third movement is one of those shyly spoken, faintly whimsical affairs characteristic of the younger Beethoven. The finale is a tarantella of irrepressible energy, with virtuosic feats of counterpoint in the development, and an adventurous coda which combines the main theme with a striding countermelody before reducing the theme to its first three notes, pianissimo – the kind of whispered joke ending Beethoven learnt from Haydn.

Octet in E flat major, op. 20

Mendelssohn

Allegro moderato ma con fuoco

Andante

Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo

Presto

The happily named Felix Mendelssohn was the greatest musical prodigy the world has known, perhaps the most precocious genius in any of the arts. Yet none of the brilliant works of his adolescence quite prepares us for the miracle of the Octet, completed in October 1825. Where Mozart at sixteen was an accomplished musical mimic, Mendelssohn was already something else. In the Octet, written for his violinist friend Eduard Rietz, he invented and perfected an entirely new genre: a chamber piece for eight individual strings (four violins, two violas and two cellos), where memorable themes and dazzlingly original textures go hand in hand with a mastery of large-scale structure.

Goethe remarked that the boy Mendelssohn had ‘the smallest modicum possible of the phlegmatic, and the maximum of the opposite quality’. This quicksilver nervous vitality is a crucial feature of the music as well as the man, not least in the Octet’s surging, sweeping opening. Youthful exuberance here co-exists with those pools of mysterious tranquillity that we so often find in Mendelssohn’s music.

Mozart is the obvious model behind the melancholy C minor *Andante*, built on contrasts between the upper and lower quartet. Yet the music never sounds like pastiche. Like Mozart, Mendelssohn had an intuitive sympathy for the dusky sonority of the viola, so evocatively exploited here.

While we know little about the Octet’s genesis, Mendelssohn’s sister Fanny wrote that the *Scherzo*, with its fleet, shimmering textures, was inspired by the Walpurgis-Night Dream scene in Goethe’s *Faust*. The finale mingles parody and compositional virtuosity. Opening in the depths with a galumphing fugue (a take-off of the Trio in Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony?), it continues with a stomping repeated-note figure and an echo of ‘And he shall reign for ever and ever’ from *Messiah*. Mendelssohn later throws the *Scherzo* theme into the mix, then gleefully obliterates it with the combined forces of the stomping motif and the *Messiah* theme.

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Chiaroscuro String Quartet

Formed in 2005, Chiaroscuro Quartet comprises violinists Alina Ibragimova and Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux, violist Emilie Hörnlund and cellist Claire Thirion. Dubbed ‘a trailblazer for the authentic performance of High Classical chamber music’ in *Gramophone* magazine, this international ensemble performs music of the Classical and early Romantic periods on gut strings and with historical bows. The quartet’s unique sound – described in *The Observer* as ‘a shock to the ears of the best kind’ – is highly acclaimed by audiences and critics all over Europe.

Recent releases in a growing discography include Beethoven opus 74 and opus 130 quartets, Mozart ‘Prussian’ quartets and Haydn opus 33, with future plans featuring the Beethoven Razumovsky Quartets.

Among the ensemble’s chamber music partners are renowned artists such as Kristian Bezuidenhout, Trevor Pinnock, Jonathan Cohen, Nicolas Baldeyrou, Chen Halevi, Malcolm Bilson, Matthew Hunt, Christian Poltera, Cédric Tiberghien and Christophe Coin. In the 2025/26 season the quartet continues with regular appearances at Wigmore Hall London and Boulez Saal Berlin, with visits to Wiener Konzerthaus, Luxembourg Philharmonie and Barbican Centre. The quartet also

returns to Japan to begin the complete Beethoven cycle at Oji Hall, which continues into the 2026/27 season.

Recent highlights have taken the ensemble on tour the US, and to the Edinburgh International Festival, Beethoven Haus Bonn and Salzburg Mozarteum.

Chiaroscuro Quartet are grateful to Jumpstart Jr Foundation for the kind loan of the 1570 Andrea Amati violin.

Consone String Quartet

The first period instrument string quartet to be selected as BBC New Generation Artists, the Consone Quartet is known for honest and expressive interpretations of repertoire, notably from the Classical and Romantic eras.

Formed at the Royal College of Music in London, the Consone Quartet's professional career was launched in 2015, shortly after which it was awarded two prizes at the 2015 York Early Music International Young Artists Competition: the EUBO Development Trust Prize and a place on the EEEmerging Scheme in France. It went on to win the 2016 Royal Over-Seas League Ensemble Prize, and in 2022 were awarded a prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust fellowship. Since 2021 the Quartet has been awarded a number of grants from Continuo Foundation which have enabled the group to take creative programmes across the UK.

The Quartet has been enthusiastically received at London's major venues, as well as further afield in Poland, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia and across North America. Festival invitations include Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Dartington, Two Moors, Buxton, MA Festival in Bruges, Heidelberger Streichquartettfest, Schwetzingen Festival and Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Germany, and Styriarte Graz in Austria. Performing highlights of the 2025/26 season include a North American tour with Kristian Bezuidenhout, featuring appearances at the Library of Congress in DC and Salle Bourgie in Montreal; a new collaboration with the Chiaroscuro Quartet (Barbican Centre and NCEM); a tour with Helen Charlston (Oxford International Song Festival, Brighton Early Music Festival); and a return to Italy with Alexander Gadjiev.

In 2023, the Consone Quartet premiered *The Bridges of Königsberg*, a string sextet by Gavin Bryars, commissioned by friends of the Quartet, the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, and BBC Radio 3, broadcast from St Martin-in-the-Fields. The group's recent collaboration with Oliver Leith continues a developing commitment to contemporary music: July 2025 marked the English and Scottish premieres of his

seven-movement quartet, *On a horse, on a hill, faraway, through fog and bonfire*, which the Quartet will also perform at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, in May 2026.

Education work remains a core interest of the group, having worked with students at the Royal College of Music in London, Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama as Hans Keller fellows for 2020-2022. This year, the quartet works with students at New England Conservatory in Boston and continues community work in South Yorkshire as Visiting Quartet for Sheffield's Music in the Round, supported by the Frost Trust.

The Consone's debut recording explored music by Haydn and Mendelssohn and was described by *The Strad* as an album 'that instantly leaps out of the stereo at you as something special'. In Spring 2023 they released the first of three recordings with Linn Records, centring around Felix Mendelssohn. The album, featuring both the '1823' and op. 44 no. 3 quartets, has been described as 'top-notch' (Allmusic) and 'exquisite' (Pizzicato). The project continues this season with a disc featuring two further quartets by the composer, alongside his sister Fanny Mendelssohn's string quartet in E flat major, released in November 2025.

The Consone Quartet are Artists-in-Residence at Paxton House (2023-2025) and at Saxon Shore Early Music Kenardington (2024-2027).

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