

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 1 June 2025  
7.30pm

This concert is supported by The Marchus Trust

## Shostakovich Cycle

### Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky violin  
Sergei Bresler violin  
Ori Kam viola  
Kyril Zlotnikov cello

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No. 7 in F sharp minor Op. 108 (1960)  
*I. Allegretto • II. Lento • III. Allegro - Allegretto*

String Quartet No. 8 in C minor Op. 110 (1960)  
*I. Largo • II. Allegro molto • III. Allegretto •  
IV. Largo • V. Largo*

### Interval

String Quartet No. 9 in E flat Op. 117 (1964)  
*I. Moderato con moto • II. Adagio •  
III. Allegretto • IV. Adagio • V. Allegro*



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25



Support Wigmore Hall during its 2025/26  
Anniversary Season.

To find out more visit [wigmore-hall.org.uk/support-us](https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/support-us)



Join & Support

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a loop to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838  
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](https://wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG  
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



Shostakovich's **Seventh Quartet** is his shortest at a sprightly 13 minutes. It was written after his divorce from his second wife, Margarita, but dedicated to the memory of his first, Nina, who died in 1954. Several biographers have claimed that Shostakovich hadn't fully experienced his grief up until this point, and it was in the Seventh Quartet that he gave full vent to it. The dedication might suggest a mourning tone, but the Quartet instead has a nervous energy, reflected in its astonishingly dense construction and thematic unity.

It opens with a 1st-violin motif that provides the material for just about every other melody in the piece, along with a short-short-long rhythmic motif that is all-pervasive. This unity is all the more remarkable considering the densely-packed adventurousness of the work. The piece is in three movements, but they are played *attacca*, meaning each leads straight into the next. The first movement is an uneven adaptation of the traditional 'sonata' scheme, with key sections seemingly 'missing'. The middle movement is a slow rumination, with quotations from Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* from texts that relate to mourning. The quoted line 'I weep much in my time of loneliness' is perhaps closely related to the work's dedication. The finale is over half the length of the whole piece, and it forms a fierce fugue of extreme difficulty, whereby an expanded version of the opening motif is passed across the instruments. A reprise of the opening motif brings the work to a fiery conclusion. Of the whole cycle, Shostakovich's Seventh Quartet shows some of the greatest accomplishment in terms of melodic unity and invention and it provides a remarkable springboard for the works to follow.

In July 1960, Shostakovich was in Dresden, commissioned to score a new film that was partly about the Allied bombing of the city. Rather than working on the film score, he plunged into writing a new string quartet at a rapid rate, and the **Eighth Quartet** was finished in just three days. The result is the most widely-performed work of chamber music since 1950, offering a tantalising web of quotations and the infamous 'DSCH' motif of notes that spells out the composer's initials in German music notation.

The opening movement initially presents a fugue on the 'DSCH' notes, but this quickly gives way to a quotation from Shostakovich's First Symphony. A quiet song-like interlude follows before the DSCH textures intrude again, alternating between the two before we plunge into the high-octane energy of the second movement. A whirling *danse macabre* leads into a quote from Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio (1944), a Jewish-inflected melody that may reflect the ongoing Soviet awareness of the Holocaust at the time of its writing. The third movement gives the DSCH notes in an om-pah-pah setting, interrupted by a quotation from Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto.

The emotional fourth movement quotes from a revolutionary song, 'Tormented by Harsh Captivity', shortly followed by a passage from his opera *Lady Macbeth* ('Seryozha, my darling!') The finale reprises the opening movement, but now 'fixed' to be an actual fugue. Shostakovich dedicated the quartet 'to the victims of Fascism and War' but wrote to a close friend that 'If some day I die, nobody is likely to write a work in memory of me, so I had better write one myself'. Even further, he wrote that 'it is a pseudo-tragic quartet, so much so that while I was composing it, I shed the same amount of tears as I would have to pee after half-a-dozen beers'. The dense web of quotations is alluringly suggestive of extra-musical meaning, and yet there is no clarification given, one of the reasons why the quartet continues to fascinate.

Shostakovich's **Ninth Quartet** had the longest gestation of any of his works, taking almost three years. A tantalising draft 'first movement' for a discarded version survives in the Shostakovich Archive, dated 1963. By the summer of 1964, he was experiencing (in his own words) a 'creative diarrhoea', and when he sat down to put the finished Ninth Quartet to paper, it took less than a month.

The first movement is a light 'sonatina', with a sense of circling around something in a restricted manner; the opening violin figure becomes the motif that unites the entire work, similar to the openings of the previous quartets. The second movement presents an elegiac meditation, entirely chordal and hymn-like in its texture. The third movement is a manic klezmer-influenced set of dance variations. It features episodes that come close to quoting Rossini's *William Tell* fanfare (which Shostakovich would go on to quote explicitly in his Fifteenth Symphony). The fourth movement is a slow series of exchanges. Intriguingly, this movement is an adaptation of the score for Grigori Kozintsev's film adaptation of *Hamlet* that Shostakovich was working on at the same time. The uneasy mood is explained when we consider that this music's role in the film is to illustrate Ophelia's descent into madness. The Ninth Quartet concludes with a whirling and furious movement that seems to pick up the musical 'characters' of the preceding movement and lifts them off in a burst of energy, like a hurricane sweeping through the memories of the music heard up to this point.

The Ninth Quartet has prompted debate between critics, with little agreement on how to 'explain' or 'place' it within Shostakovich's oeuvre. It can, however, be seen as a kind of condensing of musical tools that then points the way to the later style that will soon follow.

© Daniel Elphick 2025

*Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.*