

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 2 June 2025
7.30pm

This concert is supported by The Marchus Trust

Jerusalem Quartet

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

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No. 10 in A flat Op. 118 (1964)

*I. Andante • II. Allegretto furioso •
III. Adagio. Passacaglia • IV. Allegretto – Andante*

String Quartet No. 11 in F minor Op. 122 (1966)

*I. Introduction. Andantino • II. Scherzo. Allegretto •
III. Recitative. Adagio • IV. Etude. Allegro •
V. Humoresque. Allegro • VI. Elegy. Adagio •
VII. Finale. Moderato*

Interval

String Quartet No. 12 in D flat Op. 133 (1968)

*I. Moderato – Allegretto • II. Allegretto –
Adagio – Moderato – Allegretto*



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Shostakovich wrote his **Tenth Quartet** in just 11 days in July 1964, only six weeks after finishing his Ninth. It is dedicated to composer Mieczysław Weinberg; Shostakovich had set himself the challenge of 'catching up' with Weinberg in a competition for who could write the most quartets, and with this work, he overtook him. Shostakovich wrote: 'in celebration of this achievement, [we] had a good old booze up. Today I feel dreadful and disgusting.'

The quartet opens with an altered sonata form, manipulating the 'classical' traditions of the genre (combined with the four movements in this work, the last of Shostakovich's quartets to take the 'traditional' number). Despite the work's labelling of A flat major, the first movement frequently slips to distantly related minor keys. Scholars have called this a feeling of 'hyper-minor', the sense of being somehow 'more minor than minor' – an uneasy feeling that only increases over the piece.

The second movement is labelled *furioso*, the only time such a marking appears in Shostakovich's cycle. It presents an outburst of anger in an E minor scherzo and can be compared to the second movement of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony. The third movement presents a slow passacaglia set of variations, opening with chorale-like lines in the inner parts and the cello giving a heavily chromatic theme.

As in quartets Three through to Six, the finale of the Tenth dominates the work. It presents a complex exploration of a tight-knit group of chromatic themes in a structure that expands from the rondo-sonata classical tradition of restating themes in a particular order. In Shostakovich's case, the central section of this movement takes the 'development' character of traditional sonata and sits within the chaotic mood for an uncomfortably long period of time, ratcheting up the tension. To conclude, the opening themes are given in reverse order, fading away to a quiet ending.

Shostakovich's **Eleventh Quartet** marks the beginning of a new phase in his writing, with a noticeable turn towards a bleaker mood. It is the first of a 'quartet of quartets', in which each is dedicated to a member of the Beethoven Quartet who premièred them. The Eleventh is dedicated to second violinist Vasily Shirinsky, who died suddenly in 1965. The work is set in seven movements, each showcasing a different mood, though with a stark sense of foreboding throughout.

The opening spotlights the first violin, which begins with a disjointed melody. This is not developed by the remaining parts, who instead provide a slow accompaniment. The *Scherzo* second movement features a harshly chromatic theme which is passed around the parts, as if in a fugue, but without that form's strict structures. The third movement is a *Recitative*, in which the first violin provides distorted adaptations of themes from the previous two movements above a dissonant chord in the three lower parts. The middle movement, *Etude*, is the first moment of high energy, in the form of a virtuosic semiquaver line that is passed

across the ensemble. The accompanying parts provide melancholy chords underneath.

The *Humoresque* fifth movement has an ostinato in the second violin while other parts provide a distorted version of the first movement theme. If there is humour here, it is of the very bleakest kind, as the ostinato grinds on regardless. The *Elegy* movement is the emotional heart of the work, and the clearest passage of mourning for Shirinsky's passing. The movement ends with a solo second violin passage – a kind of 'musical ghost'. The *Finale* then presents a retrospective of the previous six movements, with the second violin continuing to take a starring role.

The Quartet was deeply personal for Shostakovich, though it took its toll; two days after the première, he suffered his first heart attack.

If the Eleventh was stark, the **Twelfth Quartet** is even starker still: for the first time, Shostakovich deployed the 12-note lines familiar from serialists like Schoenberg, though utilised within his own established musical language. For example, the work opens with a 12-note line in the cello which then cadences into D flat major, the overall key of the piece. This blending results in a further darkening of the bleakness encountered in the Eleventh, though now condensed into more economic means. The Twelfth is dedicated to Dmitri Tsiganov, first violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, who told Shostakovich that he disliked the 12-note lines; Shostakovich replied: 'but one finds examples of it in Mozart's music'.

The opening 'moderato' section blends Shostakovich's 12-note lines with tonal responses before shifting into several waltz-like sections. The central section features the most literal tribute to Shirinsky's death, in that the second violinist is silent for 34 bars (also a nod to the 34 years that the Beethoven Quartet had been playing together). The Twelfth Quartet is replete with numerology – it is no coincidence that it took until the Twelfth Quartet for 12-note lines to be centred so clearly.

The second movement is altogether stormier. It opens with a scherzo and trio that quotes several times from Beethoven's set of 'Razumovsky' quartets. This is followed by a central *Elegy*, where the Cello takes the lead with a mournful solo. All of this is concluded by a short *Allegretto*, whose clear-cut tonality seems to go against the grain of all the 12-note complexity that had preceded it.

Despite the Soviet authorities' dislike of 12-note techniques, the Twelfth Quartet had an unanimously positive reception, with many critics observing its 'symphonic' scope. Across the whole cycle, it is arguably the most condensed representation of Shostakovich's entire musical language; if the Eighth Quartet is often cited as an audience favourite, it is the Twelfth that is often held most dearly by performers.

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