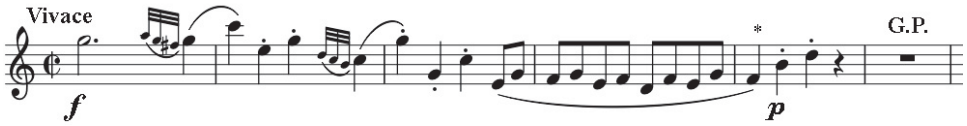
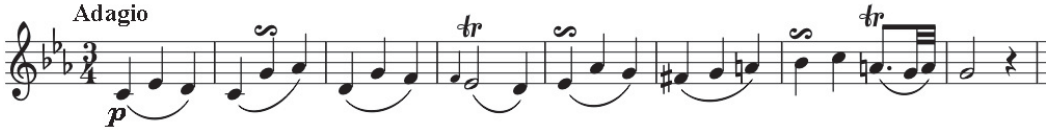
Thursday 3 October 7.30 p.m.
Jubilee Quartet

Josef Haydn (1732-1809) String Quartet in C op. 54 No. 2 (1788)
Vivace
Adagio
Menuetto – Trio
Finale: Adagio – Presto – Adagio

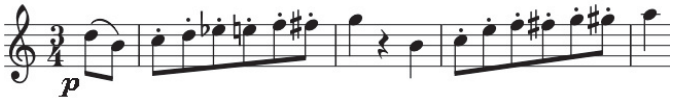
The three Op 54 quartets are the first of the 12 quartets that Haydn wrote for the Hungarian violinist Johann Tost (we heard a quartet from a later group – Op 64 no 6 - played by the Castalian Quartet at last year's launch concert). From 1783 to 1788 Tost played in the Esterházy orchestra of which Haydn was music director. When Tost left Esterházy in 1788 to freelance in Paris, Haydn entrusted 6 quartets to him with a view to finding a publisher. Tost was successful, and they were published in Paris as Op 54 & 55. This C major quartet is a masterpiece, the best of the bunch, profound and original, producing fire and eloquence from Tost's Hungarian-flavoured virtuosity. The opening 6 bars set the scene with a bold statement, but where a lesser composer might have ended the opening phrase on the F at the beginning of bar 5 (*), Haydn adds, *piano*, an interrogatory two notes: “Really?”. There is a reflective pause, followed by a repeat of the statement and question before Haydn shifts into a remote key and we stride off into the rest of the movement.



This questioning forms the heart of the extraordinary slow movement. It starts with a solemn chorale-like 8-bar phrase in the lower three parts. The motif repeats almost unchanged whilst Tost's Hungarian violin weaves a searching, improvisatory magic. The uncertainty is unresolved, with the violin inserting anguished discords just before the end.



The mood lightens in the directly following *Menuetto*, which just before its end echoes the “Really?” motif, this time in rising chromatic quavers. The doubts are roundly dismissed but immediately reappear more forcefully in the minor key *Trio*, again with jabbing anguished discords. The *Finale* is one of Haydn's most original: a long *Adagio*, interrupted by a short, skittish *Presto*, and ending with more of the *Adagio*. The rising question opens the movement, but after a few bars consideration, Haydn gives us one of his most sublime passages: the cello plays simple, long, slow, rising arpeggios while the violin weaves a very different magic from that of the slow movement, resolving all doubts. The brilliant *Presto* acts as a comic foil, but the returning *Adagio* restores calm content.



Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) String Quartet No.2 (*Intimate Letters*) (1928)
Andante - Con moto - Allegro
Adagio - Vivace
Moderato - Andante - Adagio
Allegro - Andante - Adagio

The 27 year-old Janáček married his not yet 16 year-old pupil Zdenka in 1881. But his fervent patriotism did not sit well with her staid German background and the couple separated shortly after the birth of Olga their first child in the autumn of 1882. Two years later they reunited, and a son Vladimír was born in 1888, but died of meningitis in1890. Their relationship was further strained by the death of Olga in 1903 and by Janáček's interest in other women. In 1916 he fell passionately for the assertive Gabriela Horvátová, who sang the part of the Kostelnička in the successful Prague production of *Jenůfa.* He took a holiday with her at the spa town of Luhačovice; his wife Zdenka attempted suicide and they went through a form of divorce. Around this time, Janáček also met at Luhačovice the art-dealer David Stössel and his 27 year-old wife Kamila Stösslová. Janáček fell for the strikingly beautiful Kamila, whom Zdenka saw as a useful ally against Horvátová; the couples visited each other and Zdenka corresponded extensively with Kamila. Janáček's affections for Horvátová waned, Kamila kept Janáček at a distance despite his obsessively persistent correspondence to her (in all he wrote her over 700 letters), and his relationship with Zdenka improved. Kamila stimulated a burst of creative energy in Janáček: she is identified by him with the heroines in the song cycle *The diary of one who disappeared*, and the operas *Káťa Kabanová, The Cunning Little Vixen* and *The Macropoulos Affair.* His reputation soared.

In Easter 1927 Zdenka encouraged Janáček to visit the Stössels for a few days – she wanted him out of the house while it was redecorated – and during this visit his relationship with Kamila changed. Although their first kiss was not for another year, Kamila seems to have accepted his love and his letters now fantasize about her marrying him and bearing his child. It is this changed relationship which is the basis for his second String Quartet "*Intimate Letters*". He writes to her that it was written "in fire" rather than the "hot ash" of previous compositions, and:

> "Today at my place they (the Moravian Quartet) played our quartet *Intimate Letters*... I listen. Did I write that? Those cries of joy, but what a strange thing, also cries of terror after a lullaby. Exaltation, a warm declaration of love, imploring; untamed longing. Resolution, relentlessly to fight with the world over you. Moaning, confiding, fearing. Crushing everything beneath me if it resisted. Standing in wonder before you at our first meeting. Amazement at your appearance; as if it had fallen to the bottom of a well and from that very moment I drank the water of that well. Confusion and high-pitched song of victory: 'You've found a woman who was destined for you.' Just my speech and just your amazed silence. Oh, it's a work as if carved out of living flesh. I think that I won't write a more profound and a truer one." *John Tyrrell (trans & ed) "Intimate Letters" Faber & Faber 1994.*

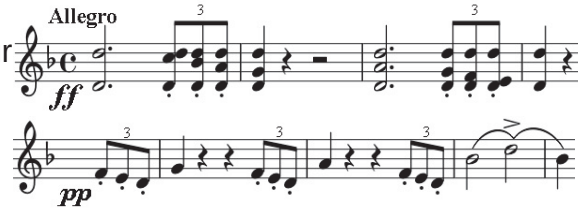
Their new relationship was short-lived. The next year, on an expedition together from a holiday cottage, the 74 year-old Janáček caught a chill which rapidly turned to a lethal pneumonia.

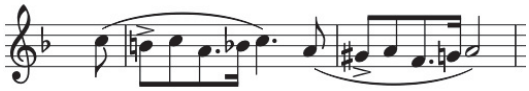
The viola part, at times representing Kamila, was originally written for the *viola d'amore*, but Janáček reassigned it to the viola to improve the texture of the quartet.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) String Quartet in D minor, D.810 (Death and the Maiden) (1824)
Allegro
Andante con moto
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Presto

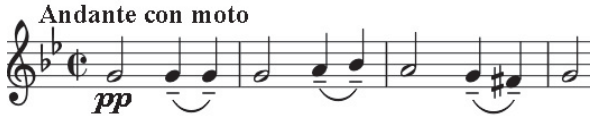
At the age of eight, Schubert started to learn the violin from his father; six years later he was composing for the family string quartet: brothers Ignaz and Ferdinand on violin, Franz on viola and his father on cello. However, the eleven or so quartets that Schubert wrote between the ages of 14 and 20 are now, like Mozart's early quartets, rarely played. The exuberant “Trout” piano quintet of 1819 and the surviving first movement of a C minor quartet (“Quartettsatz”) written in 1820 set the scene for the great chamber works of his later years: in 1824 the Octet, the A minor “Rosamunde” quartet and tonight's D minor “Death and the Maiden”; in 1826 the G major quartet; in 1827 his two piano trios; and in his last year,1828, the incomparable C major two-cello quintet.

The opening four bars of the D minor quartet set it in a different world from the understated charms of the “Rosamunde” quartet. The hammered out *fortissimo* triplet figure demands our serious attention, but is immediately transformed into an almost apologetically tender *pianissimo* phrase. After a pause, the tension mounts, driven by the triplets, to a reinforced version of the opening. This emotional roller-coaster continues throughout the movement. The triplets sometimes give way to the dotted rhythm of a yearning tune that Jack Westrup attributes to Schubert's admiration for Rossini; this theme in turn gets transformed into more serious matter against running semiquavers. The emotional intensity and tightness of construction of the movement recall the later Beethoven but it was written the year before the first of Beethoven's late quartets. The repeated notes of the opening bars and their rhythm are echoed in the themes of the other three movements.





The theme for the variations of the G minor *Andante* comes from Death's contribution to a short Schubert song of 1817, inviting a terrified young girl to sleep safely in his arms. The quartet version is altogether lighter: a fourth higher, more transparently scored and *con moto*. Resignation has replaced the sinister threat of the song. The calm of the first two variations is shattered by the brutal dactyls (–vv) of the third, a more rapid version of the rhythm of the theme; calm returns only to be broken again by the long crescendo of the repeat of the fifth variation to yet more terrifying dactyls. The terror subsides to a serene end and a Schubert hallmark switch to the major.



The fiercely syncopated energy of the *Scherzo* and its tranquil *Trio*, lead to the tarantella-form finale. The tarantella folk-dance hails from Taranto in southern Italy: a courting couple dance encircled by others as the music gets faster and faster. Taranto independently gave its name to the tarantula spider, the effects of whose allegedly serious bite could, it was thought, be ameliorated by wild dancing. Pepys records tales of itinerant fiddlers cashing in on this belief especially during the harvest when bites were more frequent. It is quite possible that Schubert intends the allusion to cheating death, but either way this energetic dance with its *prestissimo* ending provides a rousing climax to the quartet.

Programme notes by Chris Darwin