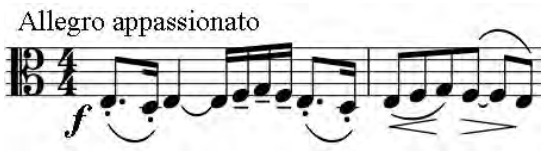
Strings Attached Concert – The Old Market
Cavaleri Quartet

All three of today's composers have links with the Brighton area, though only two are at present named on our buses, and just one on a blue plaque. **Ralph Vaughan Williams**' prep school was in Rottingdean and in 1897 he was married to Adeline Fisher, Virginia Woolf's cousin, in All Saints' Church, Hove. **Frank Bridge** was born at 7 North Street and raised in Brighton, and lived for many years in Friston where he is buried. **Jonathan Harvey** was Professor of Music at Sussex University for many years and lived in Lewes until his death in 2012.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) Quartet no. 2 in A minor (1942-1944)
'For Jean on her birthday'
Prelude: Allegro appassionato
Romance: Largo
Scherzo: Allegro
Epilogue - Greetings from Joan to Jean: Andante sostenuto

Ralph Vaughan Williams was not a composing prodigy. After learning the viola, piano and organ at Charterhouse, he studied for two years at the RCM under Stanford and then read History, and Music under Charles Wood, at Cambridge. Though drawn to composing, progress was slow. His cousin Gwen Raverat recalled 'overhearing scraps of conversation about *"that foolish young man, Ralph Vaughan Williams",* who *would* go on working at music when *"he was so hopelessly bad at it"*'. But he persevered and returned to the RCM as a student of Hubert Parry, forming lasting friendships with Leopold Stokowski and Gustav Holst. He later studied with Max Bruch in Berlin and Maurice Ravel in Paris. His discovery of English folksong in 1904 led not only to a change in his composing style but also, as with Bartók in Hungary, to collecting the songs of an oral tradition threatened with extinction.

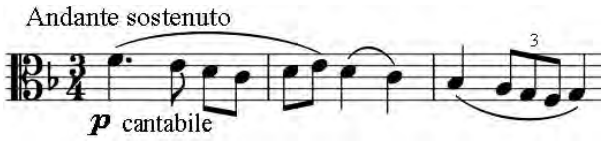
Vaughan Williams wrote three string quartets: an early, unnumbered one in C minor in 1898 which he suppressed, No 1 in G minor in 1908 (revised 1921) and today's A minor quartet composed between 1942 and 1944, around the same time as his 5th Symphony. The Jean of the dedication is Jean Stewart, violist of the Menges Quartet (founded by Sussex violinist Isolde Menges) which premiered the quartet at one of the National Gallery's lunchtime concerts in October 1944. Jean was the daughter of Haldane Stewart, composer and cricketer, and sister of Johnnie Stewart, who is best known as the creator and director of '*Top of the Pops*' for the BBC. The quartet, though, is a creature of the dark days of the war - the bleakness of Shostakovich fighting idyllic memories of a pre-war world. As befits the dedication, the viola has a dominant role in this quartet as indeed it has in many of Vaughan Williams' works for strings.



The viola's opening is agitated and ominous: a theme for its time and one that dominates the whole movement. The viola also introduces a contrasting, *dolce*, triplet-based theme, which provokes a violent climax based on the opening theme and its transformation into a peaceful ending.

The second movement is the heart of the piece. The viola, very quietly, without vibrato, presents the bleak, slow fugue. A

psalm-like passage with thick chording and responses from the viola gives way to a triumphantly *cantabile* version of the opening fugue. But the opening mood returns to end the movement with a feeling of loss. The movement is not a conventional *Romance,* perhaps more a chivalric quest. The short *Scherzo* is an anguished cry from the viola against the ominous octave forces of the other strings. The theme is borrowed from Vaughan Williams' film score for *The 49th Parallel*, a Powell-Pressburger film aimed at bringing the United States into the war.



'Joan' of the Epilogue's subtitle is St Joan of Arc; the main theme of the movement comes from the composer's sketches for a film about her which never materialised. Again the viola opens but now the mood is of reconciliation; this short, serene, hymn-like movement ends after an uplifting shift from F to D major and the final '*Amen*' of a plagal cadence.

Jonathan Harvey (1939-2012) String Quartet no 3 (1995)

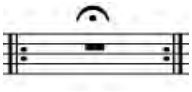
Jonathan Harvey was born in Warwickshire, but lived for much of his life in Lewes, and was for many years Professor of Music at Sussex University. His father was an amateur musician and an accomplished, self-taught composer who profoundly influenced his son's development. As a music scholar at St John's College, Cambridge Harvey quickly fell out with his composition teacher Patrick Hadley over "unprepared dissonances", and on the advice of Benjamin Britten studied privately with Erwin Stein (a pupil of Schoenberg) and Hans Keller. They gave him a solid grounding in classical forms, where music develops from moment to moment, each episode perceived against the background of what has preceded it. His next mentors, in the early 1970s, Milton Babbitt (at Princeton) and Pierre Boulez (at IRCAM in Paris) expounded 'High Modernism'; here, by contrast, time is a space in which forms can be constructed regardless of time's necessary direction in performance. These structures can be difficult for the time-bound listener to grasp. However, the computing facilities at Princeton and IRCAM also allowed Harvey to manipulate the structure of individual sounds and to transform (or 'morph') one sound into another. He found fulfilling expression in this 'Spectralism' of the transcendental and spiritual issues that emerged from his deep interest in Buddhism and in the writings of Rudolf Steiner.

In a fruitful collaboration with the Arditti Quartet, Harvey wrote four string quartets in 1977, 1988, 1995 and 2004 (with live electronics) respectively and a string trio in 2004. In today's third quartet, as Arnold Whittall points out in his book on Harvey, the players produce transformations of sounds similar to those that might otherwise be achieved electronically: *"an immense variety of special playing techniques... inflect basic sounds through different tunings, harmonics, types of vibrato and playing positions, and even orchestrate the breathing of the players at one point."*

Jonathan Harvey himself wrote of it:

> "In Quartet no. 3 there is a dialectic between a surface texture which is fleeting and fragmented and an underlying structure which is very strictly repetitive. A number of 'themes' (ten, or twenty when they combine to make 'doubles') are constantly juxtaposed in different ways; they are only developed at a few special moments. But each of theses 'themes' is somewhat insubstantial. It is as if the normal solid string tone is put under a microscope, or a solid beam of light is diffracted by a prism and scattered. Often the material moves into the borderlands of silence, only half-heard. There are themes, for

instance, on bounced bow glissandi, harmonic trills, *'col legno battuto'* [struck with the wood of the bow] and (the nearest to solid pitch) an octave G constantly inflected with microtones, this latter theme deriving from an improvisation I recorded with the cellist Francis-Marie Uitti on the CD 'Imaginings'.
The form could be described thus:
- Exposition of most of the themes, with silences
- Repeat of exposition over tritone pedal in the cello, becoming increasingly developmental
- Climax
- Two new themes combine with the old themes (double-stop glissandi theme and pizzicato theme)
- Dance-like conclusion with the *col legno battuto* theme dominant."



Interval

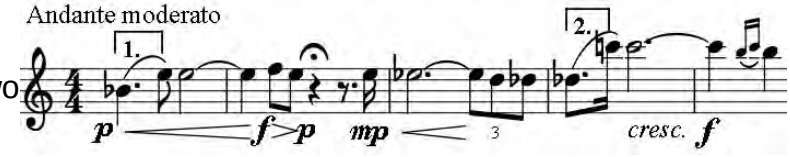
Frank Bridge (1879-1941) String Quartet no. 3 (1926)
Andante moderato - Allegro moderato
Andante con moto
Allegro energico

Brightonian Frank Bridge, born at 7 North St, was the tenth child of a violinist father - bandleader at the Brighton Empire Theatre. The young Frank often played in the band, and his playing earned him a scholarship to the Royal College where he studied violin, and composition with Stanford. He also excelled on viola: while at college he substituted in a Wigmore Hall concert at short notice for the Joachim quartet's viola who had been taken ill, he gave the UK premier of the Debussy quartet, and also performed piano quartets with Fauré. To help earn a living as a student, he composed miniatures, for violinists in particular to perform at home. He became a renowned conductor, substituting for Henry Wood at the Proms, and touring the USA conducting his own music. He taught the young Benjamin Britten composition, maintained his friendship, and touchingly, gave his viola to Britten as he and Pears set sail on the SS Ausonia for Canada in April 1939.

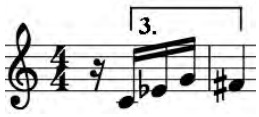
Bridge wrote four string quartets, the first two predominantly tonal and grounded in Edwardian England. But the first world war had a profound effect on him. In a 1947 radio talk, Britten recalled '*the utter horror and revulsion that [Bridge] felt about that catastrophe ... the whole of Bridge's musical world was now shattered – unlimited possibilities, harmonically and texturally especially, became possible*'.

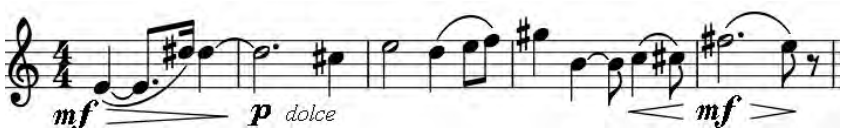
In this new musical world Bridge found his own individual voice emerging from the influence of Alban Berg and Bela Bartók. On one of his visits to the USA, Bridge's chamber music had so impressed Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge that in 1920 she awarded him a lifetime annuity, allowing him more time for composition. She later commissioned today's Third Quartet which he dedicated to her. Bridge told her that the Third Quartet '*contains the best of me I do not doubt*'. It is contemporary with Bartók's Third Quartet and Berg's Lyric Suite.

The violin's opening phrase defies tonality. The first interval [under 1.] is a tritone (or augmented fourth), a classically dissonant interval notorious for evading a settled tonality. After two bars of semitone moves the violin leaps an augmented 7th [under 2.] one semitone short of the octave; after another semitone down to B natural, we have heard all 8 semitones between Bb and F. The accompanying second violin part adds the four from F# and A to complete the full set of 12 within the first five bars.



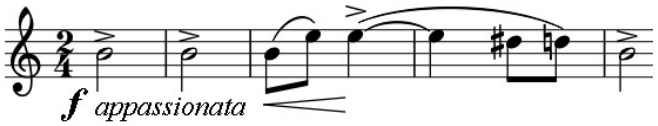
A new world indeed. The augmented 7th returns spikily *energico* on the first violin at the beginning of the *Allegro*, and the tritone [under 3.] soon also reappears around a threatening semiquaver figure, which recurs throughout the piece. Out of a gentler episode, with three of the strings moving in the same rhythm and in parallel intervals, the viola transforms the angular augmented 7th into a rhapsodic theme. Bridge develops these and other ideas in a rich and complex movement full of contrasting moods.





The slower second movement inhabits a different world, one that is closer to that of Bartók's 'night music'. In this arch-shaped movement, the initial veiled unease briefly becomes menacing with the dagger-like re-appearance of the threatening semiquaver figure [3.]. The threat retreats, but the unease remains, heightened by the thin hardness of *tremolo* played close to the bridge *(sul ponticello).*

The cello starts the last movement with the notes of the threatening semiquaver figure [3.], but very quietly and stretched in time. The other instruments enter successively, adding the same figure but at a fast tempo, and then again, with shorter intervals between, building tension. The first violin's rising augmented 7th [2.] signals the start of an agitated, angry version of the viola's rhapsodic theme from the first movement. The cello, high on its A-string, gives an anguished cry which is taken up in turn by the others, interspersed with a sinister motif on the viola, like the octave ticks of a fatal clock. These elements and others from the first two movements are woven together in a masterly and passionate movement. It ends after an intensely agitated climax in uneasy resignation.



Programme notes by Chris Darwin