



SHOSTAKOVICH

COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS
& PIANO QUINTET

CHAN 10398(6)





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Dmitri Shostakovich (second from left) with the Beethoven Quartet, 1964

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Complete String Quartets

COMPACT DISC ONE

String Quartet No. 7, Op. 108 13:42

in F sharp minor • in fis-Moll • en fa dièse mineur

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------|
| 1 | I Allegretto – | 3:39 |
| 2 | II Lento – | 3:56 |
| 3 | III Allegro – Allegretto | 6:08 |

String Quartet No. 6, Op. 101 27:12

in G major • in G-Dur • en sol majeur

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|------|
| 4 | I Allegretto | 7:15 |
| 5 | II Moderato con moto | 5:13 |
| 6 | III Lento – | 6:33 |
| 7 | IV Lento – Allegretto – Andante | 7:59 |

String Quartet No. 10, Op. 118 27:08

in A flat major • in As-Dur • en la bémol majeur

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|------|
| 8 | I Andante | 5:14 |
| 9 | II Allegretto furioso | 4:08 |
| 10 | III Adagio – | 7:39 |
| 11 | IV Allegretto | 9:58 |

TT 68:28



COMPACT DISC TWO

String Quartet No. 4, Op. 83

in D major • in D-Dur • en ré majeur

24:49

- | | | |
|---|------------------|------|
| 1 | I Allegretto | 3:55 |
| 2 | II Andantino | 7:18 |
| 3 | III Allegretto – | 4:27 |
| 4 | IV Allegretto | 9:01 |

String Quartet No. 11, Op. 122

in F minor • in f-Moll • en fa mineur

18:42

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|------|
| 5 | I Introduction. Andantino – | 2:24 |
| 6 | II Scherzo. Allegretto – | 3:17 |
| 7 | III Recitative. Adagio – | 1:43 |
| 8 | IV Etude. Allegro – | 1:18 |
| 9 | V Humoresque. Allegro – | 1:01 |
| 10 | VI Elegie. Adagio – | 5:19 |
| 11 | VII Finale. Moderato | 3:38 |

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 73

in F major • in F-Dur • en fa majeur

35:02

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|-------|
| 12 | I Allegretto | 7:17 |
| 13 | II Moderato con moto | 5:53 |
| 14 | III Allegro non troppo | 4:14 |
| 15 | IV Adagio – | 6:39 |
| 16 | V Moderato | 10:52 |

TT 78:52

COMPACT DISC THREE

String Quartet No. 9, Op. 117

in E flat major • in Es-Dur • en mi bémol majeur

27:20

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|------|
| 1 | I Moderato con moto – | 4:20 |
| 2 | II Adagio – | 5:36 |
| 3 | III Allegretto – | 3:52 |
| 4 | IV Adagio – | 4:13 |
| 5 | V Allegro | 9:18 |

String Quartet No. 13, Op. 138

in B flat minor • in b-Moll • en si bémol mineur

20:07

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 6 | Adagio – Doppio movimento – Tempo primo | |
|---|---|--|



String Quartet No. 8, Op. 110

in C minor • in c-Moll • en ut mineur

24:46

- | | | | |
|----|-----|-----------------|------|
| 7 | I | Largo – | 5:42 |
| 8 | II | Allegro molto – | 2:39 |
| 9 | III | Allegretto – | 4:39 |
| 10 | IV | Largo – | 7:07 |
| 11 | V | Largo | 4:39 |

TT 72:26

COMPACT DISC FOUR

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 68

in A major • in A-Dur • en la majeur

37:49

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---|-------|
| 1 | I | Overture. Moderato con moto | 8:43 |
| 2 | II | Recitative and Romance. Adagio | 11:15 |
| 3 | III | Waltz. Allegro | 5:31 |
| 4 | IV | Theme with Variations. Adagio –
Moderato con moto – Allegretto – Più mosso –
Allegro – Adagio | 12:19 |

String Quartet No. 14, Op. 142

in F sharp major • in Fis-Dur • en fa dièse majeur

27:31

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---|-------|
| 5 | I | Allegretto | 8:44 |
| 6 | II | Adagio | 10:09 |
| 7 | III | Allegretto – Poco meno mosso – A tempo – Adagio | 8:38 |

TT 65:29

COMPACT DISC FIVE

String Quartet No. 5, Op. 92

in B flat major • in B-Dur • en si bémol majeur

31:33

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I | Allegro non troppo – | 11:32 |
| 2 | II | Andante – Andantino – | 8:53 |
| 3 | III | Moderato – Allegretto – Andante | 11:08 |

String Quartet No. 15, Op. 144

in E flat minor • in es-Moll • en mi bémol mineur

37:06

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---------------------------------|-------|
| 4 | I | Elegy. Adagio – | 11:15 |
| 5 | II | Serenade. Adagio – | 5:05 |
| 6 | III | Intermezzo. Adagio – | 1:47 |
| 7 | IV | Nocturne. Adagio – | 5:05 |
| 8 | V | Funeral March. Adagio molto – | 6:08 |
| 9 | VI | Epilogue. Adagio – Adagio molto | 7:46 |

TT 68:54

COMPACT DISC SIX

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 49

in C major • in C-Dur • en ut majeur

14:53

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---------------|------|
| 1 | I | Moderato | 4:31 |
| 2 | II | Moderato | 4:45 |
| 3 | III | Allegro molto | 2:17 |
| 4 | IV | Allegro | 3:19 |



String Quartet No. 12, Op. 133

in D flat major • in Des-Dur • en ré bémol majeur

29:00

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|---|----|----------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I | Moderato | 7:41 |
| 6 | II | Allegretto – Adagio – Allegretto | 21:19 |

Piano Quintet, Op. 57

in G minor • in g-Moll • en sol mineur

32:52

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|----|-----|---------------------|-------|
| 7 | I | Prelude. Lento – | 4:46 |
| 8 | II | Fugue. Adagio | 11:01 |
| 9 | III | Scherzo. Allegretto | 3:19 |
| 10 | IV | Intermezzo. Lento – | 6:22 |
| 11 | V | Finale. Allegretto | 7:24 |

Martin Roscoe piano

TT 77:01

Sorrel Quartet

Gina McCormack violin

Catherine Yates violin

Vicci Wardman viola (Nos 3, 4, 6, 7, 10 & 11)

Sarah-Jane Bradley viola

Helen Thatcher cello

Shostakovich: Complete String Quartets

The string quartet was to become for Shostakovich a life-long commitment, a semi-autobiographical medium for the expression of his most intimate feelings, yet his first quartet was begun in an almost casual spirit of relaxation after the creative effort that had gone into the making of his Symphony No. 5. As Gerald Abraham pointed out¹, this approach to chamber music as a 'light', domestic genre was in keeping with a tradition in Russian music that had given more importance to orchestral and vocal/operaic genres, and a glance at the catalogue of Shostakovich's work up to this point shows him following the same path. Moreover, the central European tradition of chamber music as a 'pure', non-programmatic genre ran counter to another important strand in Russian music, given a renewed, Soviet emphasis in the doctrine of 'Socialist Realism' (1932), which stressed the importance of 'content' (i.e. concretely programmatic meaning) over 'form'. And so, in the composer's own words, we have it that he wanted to express 'spring-like moods' in his First String Quartet (1938) which celebrates a key that in the classical literature had become an icon for wholesome innocence and (as in Haydn's *The Creation*) primeval light: the tonal

system's 'foundational' key of C major. There is no other string quartet by Shostakovich in this key, and it seems significant that the late quartets – the ones at the end of the journey, so to speak – are set in keys far removed from it. (It had apparently been the composer's stated aim to write a quartet in all twenty-four keys after the example of Bach's Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues.) The Piano Quintet and Second Piano Trio proved to be no light weight affairs, and both the Second and Third String Quartets served to consolidate a new-found seriousness of expression in Shostakovich's chamber music. The Third Quartet – dedicated to the Beethoven Quartet who gave the official premieres of all Shostakovich's quartets bar Nos 1 and 15 – was the last large-scale instrumental premiere before the notorious Zhdanov Decree in 1948 imposed a ban on 'music that was not accessible to the wide masses', which lasted until the death of Stalin in March 1953. It is not surprising that the intimate medium of the string quartet should become a vehicle for the composer's deepest feelings during the difficult period of this cultural quarantine. Both the Fourth and Fifth Quartets were products of these years – years during which the composer produced a series



of works that had to wait until after Stalin's death to receive their official premiere in the Soviet Union. By the time he came to compose String Quartets Nos 7 and 8 in 1960, the medium was indeed deeply confessional and autobiographical in tone. It is a curious fact that the celebrated composer of epic symphonies on a mega-Mahlerian scale could at the same time produce such works of sparseness and concentration as the Seventh Quartet. The Eighth Quartet, written at a time of depression and near-suicide, is a movingly personal document that reflects in sadness and anger on a troubled career; it is rich in self-quotation and saturated with the composer's musical monogram D-S-C-H (the German letter names for the notes D, E flat, C and B natural derived from the musical letters in the German transliteration of his name: Dmitri Shostakowitsch). The quartet includes an especially poignant reference to an aria from his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, the opera that marked the first crisis in a creative life beset with the bureaucratic socio-political pressures of Stalinist Soviet Russia. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the string quartets represent the purely private side of the composer's musical personality. For example, the Fifth Quartet and, perhaps more especially, the later dodecaphonic Twelfth Quartet are large symphonic works, every bit as 'public', as

symphonic in conception, as their orchestral counterparts. The Twelfth Quartet proved to be an arena for the dramatisation of ethical/moral issues that had previously been the province of programmatic symphonies such as the Fifth, Seventh, Eighth or Eleventh. And just as the Thirteenth Quartet can be viewed as a pendant to the Fourteenth Song-Symphony about death, so there are features of the content and style of the Fourteenth Quartet that are to some extent anticipated in the four movement symphony that immediately precedes it – the valedictory (and indeed chamber-like) Fifteenth. The whole of Shostakovich's last creative period is summed up in his final Quartet in E flat minor – a key far removed from the innocent C major of the First Quartet. It completes a thematically interrelated cycle of late string quartets – a kind of *Winterreise* beginning with No. 12 – which through their dedications to founding members of the Beethoven Quartet were to become, in retrospect, elegies for close colleagues. The Fifteenth Quartet (1974) bore no such dedication, but its sombre contents and funereal aspect suggest that Shostakovich was composing his own requiem.

CD1: String Quartets Nos 6, 7 & 10

The three quartets on this disc give an excellent idea of the vitality, the immense

variety of expression, the virtuosity of formal and textural treatment, the consistency of style (never parodying itself) which Shostakovich brought to this medium. By the time Shostakovich had completed his unusually serene **String Quartet No. 6, Op. 101 in G major** – performed in Leningrad by the Beethoven Quartet on 5 October 1956, his fiftieth birthday year – he was already about to begin work on the epic Eleventh Symphony. Before its completion, in 1961, there were to be two more string quartets. No. 6 may be the lightweight quartet of the three in terms of emotional content, but it is cast as a substantial four-movement sonata cycle very much in the high Viennese classical tradition. Here is Shostakovich writing for his friends in the Beethoven Quartet in a manner that invokes, yet at the same time transforms, the spirit of Haydn and Schubert in a subtly modulated contemporary language. Cadential harmony, key contrast and the classical interval of the third are its very lifeblood, but the physiognomy, at once tender and sly, is pure Shostakovich. The composer's contemporaries considered this quartet a kind of throwback to the spring-like moods of his First String Quartet; in much the same way we have here a quartet that is far removed from the smoke and thunder of the forthcoming Eleventh Symphony.

The first movement is a smiling *Allegretto*, almost casual in mood as it kicks off with a morse-code rhythm on viola that is another of the composer's calling cards. Following a classical exposition, the development of the two contrasting subject groups becomes intense but does not overstep the expressive boundary of what is essentially a contented, sunny opening movement. Relaxing into the reversed recapitulation and coda, the movement ends with a gentle 'perfect' cadence that is to prove a charming motto feature of the quartet as a whole, for each of the four movements ends in the same way, with the cello harking back to a melodic figure taken from the very first page. Moving to E flat major, the second movement is a graceful Schubertian dance in minuet and trio form, its regular patterns offset by fluid, free-speech melody. (Here the style comes very close to that of the early First Quartet.) Having signed the movement off with his quiet motto cadence from the first movement, Shostakovich now broaches a deeper, more thoughtful vein of expression in a passacaglia – a characteristic stylization that invariably embodied for him a mood of high seriousness. It resolves magically via the motto cadence from its dark key of B flat minor into the daylight of G major for the finale – a melodious movement which stirs memories of an earlier chamber music



finale in Shostakovich, that of the wartime Piano Quintet in the same key. This is another sonata arch form, unfolding in a mood of gentle waywardness, and its droll second subject is a humorous dance whose repeated notes clearly look forward to the return of the first-movement main theme. After a climactic development of its material that brings back at its peak the theme of the passacaglia, the music unwinds to its starting point with a recapitulation in reverse, the second subject now pointedly linked to a recollection of the first movement. With the return of the first theme the quartet serenely moves towards its close and the final reassuring motto cadence sounds for the last time.

In startling contrast came **String Quartet No. 7, Op. 108 in F sharp minor**. Composed in 1960, this quartet is as compressed and intense in its expression as its predecessor is light-hearted and expansive. (Compare its thirteen-minute duration with that of the twenty-seven-minute No. 6.) It was dedicated to the memory of his first wife, Nina, who had died in 1954. Its spare and tightly-knit three movements play without a break. The playfully descending theme of the first movement *Allegretto* with its jaunty anapaest sequel (after Haydn's Op. 71 No. 3) is destined to return in anguished transformation at the climax of the fugal finale, but for the time being this swift, mercurial movement (shorn of a central

development section), with its bouncing second subject, gives no hint of the fury and turmoil ahead. The second movement is a funeral march which has an accompanimental figure taken from the first movement and based on the octatonic scale, made up of alternate tones and semitones. It is this figure which becomes the starting point of the subject of the angry, protesting fugue which at its climax reclaims the first movement's main theme in distorted transformation, each of the four instruments in a different key. From this point the music winds down to its close via an elegant yet enigmatic little waltz derived from the fugue subject, and finally back to the cyclic return of the first subject in its original second (3/4) pizzicato presentation. The quartet closes in a mood of calm but subdued resignation – in the major key.

It became Shostakovich's practice in his later quartets to begin with a prefatory solo epigram. **String Quartet No. 10, Op. 118 in A flat major**, written immediately after the Ninth in July 1964 and dedicated to his friend and colleague Moshe S. Weinberg, begins in this way with a sinuous dance figure for first violin. Made up of all but two notes of the chromatic scale, it anticipates the later twelve-note Shostakovich of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Quartets. Here it leads into what is to become a kind of motto refrain.

This anapaestic motif provides a kind of hypnotized point of stability in the course of what in effect forms an introductory movement, a moodily fluid, even sinister, fantasy-improvisation. In sharp contrast comes a fiery, obsessively repetitive scherzo in E minor, an evil, grindingly dissonant devil-dance in march tempo, very much in the vein of the second movement of the Tenth Symphony. This is followed by a reflective passacaglia in A minor based on a nine-bar theme (cello solo) of grave modal harmony which will return at the climax of the development of a large-scale finale. Following without a break, the good-humoured dance theme of this finale promises no heroics as it rubs teasingly against its polka-like accompaniment. In the course of this large episodic sonata-rondo design Shostakovich brings back both the scherzo and passacaglia themes, finally returning to the enigmatic motto refrain of the very opening in a satisfyingly cyclic closure of the whole quartet.

CD2: String Quartets Nos 3, 4 & 11
String Quartet No. 4, Op. 83 in D major was completed in December 1949, and although the work did not receive its official premiere by the Beethoven Quartet until 3 December 1953, Shostakovich had already developed a special relationship with the

Borodin String Quartet who had given the first performance at a special audition of the piece arranged by themselves at the Ministry of Culture in 1950. According to Rostislav Dubinsky, the leader of the Quartet, they played the work twice at this audition: first in an intensely Jewish way that brought out the subversive 'sub-text' of the music (these were the years when Shostakovich consistently adopted the intonations of Jewish folk music as a kind of Aesopian form of irony) and then – to the manifest approval and relief of his auditors – in a 'straight' classical style that somehow ironed out these complications. Although the cellist of the Quartet has subsequently dismissed Dubinsky's account as an untenable fabrication ('music cannot lie'), this does not invalidate a perception of the music as double-edged. It is a music that on the surface complies with established classical norms, yet the discursive freedom of its melodic line is at odds with the neat symmetries of its various thematic starting points and the stability of classical harmony is constantly breached by disturbing dissonance. This is a subtle language that does seem to carry conflicting layers of meaning, a language that, in the words of Volkov quoting Shostakovich on Jewish folk music, 'can appear to be happy when it is tragic... laughter through tears'. For Dubinsky, there was no mistaking the underlying seriousness



of this quartet, the 'foreboding' mood of the first movement, the 'plaintive' F minor lyricism of the second, the 'sinister, muted scherzo' in C minor and the 'tragic Jewish themes' of the dance finale – to which it is organically linked by means of a 'speech melody' transition on the viola. Once into the *Allegretto* dance finale we find ourselves in the world of Shostakovich's *Songs from Jewish Folk Poetry* composed the previous year – a world of sadness, protest, want and bitter humour. The quartet has come full circle with the grinding drone of the first movement and in due course the subsequent recall of its various motifs (the leading motif of the quartet – a pivoting major second – refers pointedly and persistently to the same motif in the Eighth ('war') Symphony – a Symphony specifically targeted and banned by the authorities). But it now moves forward into a lumbering dance that combines intense melancholy with a sturdy will to survive. As the dance gathers impetus and the various strands are drawn together the identification with the music of a persecuted race becomes an inspiring expression of defiance mingled with pain.

String Quartet No. 11, Op. 122 in F minor (completed on 30 January 1966) occupies a somewhat different position in Shostakovich's oeuvre. Rather like Beethoven's Op. 95 in the same key, it

marks a transition into the darker world of the composer's late string quartets. At its emotional centre is an Elegy in funeral-march style, and that is no accident, because the quartet was dedicated to the memory of the second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, Vasily Shirinsky, who had died the previous year. Shostakovich had already broken away from the classical four-movement scheme in the Third and Eighth Quartets, and – via both the Eighth and Ninth in arch form – was becoming interested in the idea of multi-movement unity-in-continuity. Here is a suite-like assembly of miniature character pieces shaped into a larger cyclic whole which becomes the sum of its parts. The shifting moods of this seven-movement cavalcade are volatile and enigmatic. A strong element of the sinister and grotesque pervades its uncanny progress and at one point violence erupts without warning. This occurs in the grimacing third movement entitled 'Recitative', which seems to speak in mechanical spasms. The motto theme of the quartet, following the prefatory *idée fixe* for solo violin from which it is derived, is a hopping stepwise motif in the cello that becomes a mysterious morse-code tapping accompanied by a menacing *glissando* figure in the succeeding Scherzo. It is this music that, after the gloomy Elegy and climactic reprise of the opening monologue in an anguished/distorted transformation,

returns to bring the quartet to a close that is at once gently consoling (in its rocking pentatonic accompaniment) and disturbing (again the ghostly, tapping tune). Shortly after the first performance on 28 May 1966 the composer suffered his first heart attack: it was his sixtieth birthday year. In retrospect the music of this Eleventh Quartet – tense, minimalist, macabre – seems a harbinger of the later Shostakovich. The music of the final decade (there were to be four more string quartets) forms a dark epilogue to his life's work that fades away in the final pages of the Sonata for viola and piano.

Shostakovich's first two string quartets had hardly prepared his public for the 'symphonic' weight of **String Quartet No. 3, Op. 73 in F major**, on which work began in January 1946, some five months after the completion of his disconcertingly light-weight Ninth Symphony. It is as if 'public' symphony and 'private' quartet had exchanged roles, for there is much in this quartet that evokes orchestral analogies – and indeed the innovative five-movement scheme was taken directly from both the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies. According to one reliable source² the composer gave programmatic titles (relating to Russia's Great Patriotic War) to each of the five movements, but these do not appear in the printed score. Not that the first movement prepares us for serious matters.

Setting out in a sunny F major, it turns out to be a well-bred sonata movement. Despite its Chaplinesque banana-skin slips of key, it may be said to behave in a perfectly orthodox classical manner, complete with repeat of the exposition section and a thorough-going fugal development of its main subject that seems, admittedly, somewhat at odds with its casual profile.

But the second movement, in the remote key of E minor, is a jolt. Suddenly we find ourselves in more hostile territory – a bumpy ride of mechanical ostinato waltz patterns that are straddled by off-key, fanfare-like tropes of melody that end with a whoop. A sinister little trio of staccato quavers makes its further contribution to a much transformed reprise which winds down to an inconclusive cadence. Those who know their Shostakovich Tenth Symphony will recognise at once a pre-echo of its so-called 'portrait of Stalin' movement in the fierce down-beat chords of the third movement (G sharp minor; 2/4). This is neither dance movement nor march, but rather a brutal amalgam of the two that struts along in a rage and a state of high tension, like some unstoppable war machine. Both the placement and manner of this and the previous movement recall the second and third movements of the Eighth Symphony, the second of the so-called 'war' symphonies, with their no less implacable



images of evil. The comparison with the Eighth Symphony is further underlined in the sequel – a hushed, passacaglia-like *Adagio* in the manner of a funeral march that strives towards a dissonant climax before subsiding into a drumming funeral duet for cello and viola. The finale, into which it leads without a break, is the longest movement. It is a strangely subdued dance rondo (6/8) whose main theme is a long, drawn-out and troubled cello solo. In due course a new dance episode (A major; 2/4) appears, suggesting a reminder of the first movement. The return of the main theme now moves on to a climactic re-engagement with the *Adagio*, creating an effect not unlike Beethoven's dramatic stroke in the finale of his Opus 135 Quartet with the return of 'Muß es sein?'. After the briefest of returns to both the dance episode (now in the minor) and the main theme, the music at last sinks to a stable and sustained F major, over which we hear the dying whispers of the main theme. Hardly a 'happy ending' – almost, in fact, a contradiction of the original promise of that spring-like first movement. The first performance was given by the Beethoven Quartet – to whom it was dedicated – on 16 December 1946 in Moscow.

CD3: String Quartets Nos 8, 9 & 13
String Quartet No. 9, Op. 117 in E flat major, dedicated to Shostakovich's devoted

companion in his later years, his young wife Irina (née Suprinskaya), is the first of two string quartets composed in close succession in 1964. During a four-year break from writing string quartets, two symphonies – Nos 12 and 13 – had materialised, and *The Execution of Stepan Razin*, a powerfully dramatic symphonic cantata 'in the Russian style' to a poem by Yevgeni Yevtushenko, was due to follow close on the heels of the quartets the same year. The Ninth Quartet marks a fresh stage in the composer's development, both in its anticipation of the more radical, stridently dissonant Shostakovich of the Twelfth Quartet and in the way in which it builds on the special experience of the Eighth Quartet, with its motto-theme technique and its overlapping five-movement continuity. In doing so, it confirms the string quartets as an emerging cycle of thematically interrelated works. It is also significant in its choice of key: E flat is a key already associated with jovial moods in the Ninth Symphony and this quartet forms no exception in maintaining the mood association, although it is thrown into relief by the chorale-like gravity of its two slow movements. The extensive finale forms the true goal of this quartet: it assumes the role of a gruffly aggressive scherzo which provides cyclic completion, recalling material from all four previous movements in its sonata-like elaboration. Towards the point of expected

recapitulation, and following a vigorous fugal development of the main theme, its momentum is brought to a shuddering halt by the return of the cello recitative from the previous *Adagio* over a menacing tremolo. And this leads not to a straight recapitulation in the main key but to the unexpected return of the third-movement scherzo combined with a new descending idée fixe, E-C-A-F-D-B-G-E flat, that persists to the end like an insistent peal of bells. (It could well be that these eight notes form another of the composer's private cryptograms.) The central movement of this symmetrically designed five-movement quartet, to which the closing section of the finale refers, is an ironic scherzo that keeps toppling into an allusion to the motif from the Overture to Rossini's *William Tell* (as does the first movement of the late-period Fifteenth Symphony). Flanking it are the two contrasting *Adagios* (movements two and four), and the quartet is launched by a compressed *Moderato con moto* sonata movement which is casual, almost reserved in manner. Two subjects are polarised here: the one reflective and intervallically obsessive, the other a dance-tune introduced on the cello that hops about on one leg, making play with the composer's familiar morse-code rhythms. The quartet was performed (together with its companion piece, the Tenth String Quartet) by the Beethoven Quartet in

the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 20 November 1964.

String Quartet No. 13, Op. 138 in B flat minor (1970) is a frightening work, much admired by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears at a private hearing in Moscow, April 1971. Shostakovich's close friend Isaac Glickman took it to be a requiem, and it was mistakenly reviewed at a Moscow performance in 1971 as a memorial to its septuagenarian dedicatee, the retired founding viola player of the Beethoven Quartet, Vadim Borisovsky, who died in 1972. There is little to relieve its dark moods and grim grotesqueness. Gerald Abraham has called it 'a pendant to the Fourteenth Symphony' and there can be little doubt that images of death and desolation haunt its pages, some of them indeed taken directly from the Fourteenth Symphony. Appropriately enough, and perhaps in homage to Borisovsky, the quartet begins with a sorrowful monologue for the viola which establishes the mood of the lamenting first section, with its falling semitones and painful dissonances. The quartet runs continuously and is constructed along palindromic lines, with an extended *danse macabre* forming the middle and fastest section. An interesting feature of this palindromic formation is the strict metronomic interrelationship of these various sections, so that as the work



speeds up section by section towards the midpoint and then makes its retrograde return to the initial tempo, the metronome pulse of 84 remains constant throughout. (A similar technique operates in the last quartet, No. 15.) With its adaptation of Schoenberg's twelve-tone method (continuing the twelve-note thematicism prominent in the Twelfth Quartet), its daring exploitation of timbre, its high level of dissonance and its spare textures, this quartet is perhaps the composer's most 'advanced' work and could be regarded as a kind of homage to Webern, who was much lauded by the Western avant-garde in the later Sixties. The quartet was given its first performance by the Beethoven Quartet on 13 September 1970 in the favoured venue of the Glinka Concert Hall, Leningrad.

String Quartet No. 8, Op. 110 in C minor

was composed in the astonishingly short period of three days, in July 1960. Shostakovich had been visiting Dresden for the purpose of collaborating with Leo Arnshtam on a film, *Five Days and Five Nights*, which was to commemorate the wartime destruction of the city. Instead of composing the film music Shostakovich found himself in the grip of an urge to set to work on a new string quartet which he dedicated 'to the memory of the victims of fascism and war'. But in a letter to his close friend, Isaac

Glickman, the composer was to confide that he had written this quartet in memory of himself, telling Glickman, 'You could even write on the cover: "Dedicated to the memory of the composer of this quartet".' And so, although it can hardly be doubted that the feelings aroused by the fate of Dresden were a catalyst, it would appear that Shostakovich was at the same time identifying himself with 'the victims of fascism and war'. Another source close to the composer has recorded that this was a time of deep depression in his career and that, in a suicidal state of mind, he was regarding the Eighth String Quartet as his last work.

Quotation was becoming one of Shostakovich's favourite compositional devices, and in this quartet, as if replaying the significant events of his life, he quotes reflectively from previous compositions in more or less chronological order. These self-quotations, independent of their extra-musical significance, share motivic-thematic kinship with each other, becoming organic members of the musical fabric and contributing to its overlapping continuity. But in their new context these quotations do suggest a referential meaning. It is as if the composer was saying, 'I am Dmitri Shostakovich and as I look back on my life and work these are some of my most important pieces, marking significant stages in my career.' Thus in the elegiac first

movement we are reminded not only of the opening of the First Symphony (1925), in slow tempo near the beginning, but also, a little further on, of the main theme from the Fifth Symphony (1937), written at a turning point in his career. (There is some ambiguity here, for apparently Shostakovich said he himself had in mind the slow theme from the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony.) The second movement, closely related in its threatening aspect to the third movement of the Eighth Symphony (1943), quotes a theme from the Finale of the Second Piano Trio (1944). This is another wartime piece dedicated to the memory of a close friend and colleague, said to be inspired by Shostakovich's feelings of revulsion towards news of Nazi atrocities against the Jews. In the third movement, just before the central Trio section as well as in the reprise, we hear the opening of the First Cello Concerto (1959). This quotation, coupled with a heavy down-bow motif on repeated notes, forms the protesting basis of the fourth movement while also establishing a close relationship with the motto theme D-E flat-C-B natural (D-S-C-H). In the fourth movement the quotation of a pre-revolutionary song, 'Worn out by the weight of slavery', suggests a link with the Eleventh Symphony 'The Year 1905' (1957). The only quotation out of step with this chronological sequence occurs towards the

end of the fourth movement on the cello. This is an excerpt from Katerina's aria in the final scene of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* ('Seryozha! My dear! At last! I haven't seen you all day. Seryozha!') and it serves as a reminder of how Shostakovich became a victim of Stalinist oppression in 1936 when this opera was condemned as being 'muddle instead of music'.

What seals this quartet as an autobiographical statement is the all-pervasiveness of Shostakovich's musical signature D-S-C-H. This 'calling card' had first appeared explicitly in the Tenth Symphony (1953). At the beginning of the Eighth String Quartet it is heard as a kind of cantus firmus in all four instruments, not unlike the way J.S. Bach (whose own similar use of a musical monogram, B flat-A-C-B natural, is a precedent) treats the very similar four-note theme of the C sharp minor Fugue in Book One of his Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues. D-S-C-H makes further appearances in the second and third movements of this quartet – the third movement using it as an ostinato dance figure –, and, becoming a fugal subject in its own right, it dominates the arch-like closure of the final *Largo* which refers again to the opening of the First Symphony. The quartet was given its first performance by the Beethoven Quartet on 2 October 1960 in Leningrad.



CD4: String Quartets Nos 2 & 14

Standing almost thirty years apart (1944 and 1973), these two string quartets by Shostakovich present the listener with contrasting self-portraits of the creative artist at two very different stages of his highly productive and eventful life. The Second is the technically assured work of a celebrated (if already deeply scarred) composer in his late thirties whose every new work commands an eagerly awaited and respectful hearing. The Fourteenth, on the other hand, is the intimate communication of an ageing and physically frail master – world weary, even, to the point of spiritual withdrawal – to a close colleague and friend. If the latter, subtle and elusive, speaks in intimate whispers, gruff outbursts, sly digs in the rib and heartfelt sighs, then the former, wearing a more formal aspect, is very much a public work that presents itself through its performers to a Leningrad audience fully conversant with its composer's high achievements.

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 68 in A major set the seal on the composer's life-long professional association with the Beethoven Quartet, an association that – with the composer as pianist – had already begun through two of Shostakovich's most important pieces of chamber music, the Piano Quintet of 1940 and the Second Piano Trio. The latter work – a deeply serious piece of chamber

music if ever there was one – immediately preceded the composition of the Second String Quartet, and was premièred together with the quartet in Leningrad on 14 November 1944. The Second String Quartet, notwithstanding the precedent of the First, marks the composer's real beginning as a writer of string quartets. In contrast with its slight predecessor it is a substantial work, large-limbed for all its suite-like conception, and formally speaking very much an essay that builds on classical precedent without in the least seeming a mere 'neo-classical' parody in any sense of the word. (In this respect it may be compared with the Tchaikovsky Orchestral Suites.) Shostakovich's most recent symphony had been the weighty and tragic Eighth and it was not until the writing of the Third Quartet (composed some two years after the Second) that he began to imbue the genre with the dark intensity already characteristic of the symphonies. Despite its darker moments, the agony of war is emphatically not the subject of this quartet, which is addressed in the first place to musicians by a master musician and is couched in a key with sunny associations (J.S. Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn) in the classical literature.

The assertive Overture in 3/4 time is built on a muscular eight-bar main theme that goes through many transformations in the course of a large-scale sonata movement (complete with a contrasting second subject

and classical repeat of the exposition), the most remarkable of which is the gently swaying C minor waltz it becomes at the outset of a long and gradually intensifying development. The compressed (and largely subdued) recapitulation is in the minor key (thus anticipating the key of the finale), returning to its original major key aspect as a coda that links it epigrammatically with the second subject. Next – a freely expanding and climactic arioso led by the first violin, who is also the eloquent protagonist in a framing recitative. The key of that movement – B flat major – is the dominant of its successor in E flat minor, a fast moving and shadowy Waltz (required to be played *con sordino* throughout) in which fluid thematic shapes and tonal instability generate a manic, unstoppable momentum of their own. Like the introduction ('Müss es sein?') to the finale of Beethoven's Op.135 quartet, the *Adagio* introduction to the Theme with Variations finale is a prefatory dialogue, tapering from an expressive *forte* to a high whispering *molto pianissimo* on first violin in its smooth transition from the E flat minor key of the Waltz to the A minor theme. The folk-like theme itself, big brother to that of the First Quartet's second movement, is intoned by the viola and finds itself drawn to distant keys in its mixed-modal unfolding. Paced with a symphonist's command of large-scale form, the free variation movement

that follows is through-composed, the theme showing an amazing capacity for re-inventing itself in new guises. The movement closes with a chorale-like restatement of the introduction and the first four bars of the theme, now delivered as a triumphant peroration; what a difference it must have made at that first performance to the bleak dying fall of the Second Piano Trio's closing bars!

On the face of it, **String Quartet No. 14, Op. 142 in F sharp major** in three movements will perhaps seem more conventional than its immediate predecessors, both of them highly innovative in form, style and content. The quartet continues the line of late works dedicated to individual members of the Beethoven Quartet, the present work being dedicated to the cellist, Sergey Shirinsky. Since the work was composed with him in mind, the quartet 'speaks' to its dedicatee by giving a heightened virtuoso role to the cello, and in the last movement uses a theme said to derive from the cellist's name as well as addressing him directly through a quote from the final scene of Shostakovich's opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* ('Seryozha! My dear!'). This is characteristic of a composer who, from the Eighth String Quartet onwards, became addicted to pitch ciphers and frequent self-quotation. Formally speaking, the first movement is cast in a typical palindromic sonata design based on two



playfully contrasted subjects. The light 'toyshop' manner shares something of the character of the first movement of the Fifteenth Symphony which nevertheless gives way in the reprise to more reflective passages of solo recitative, leading to a nostalgic closing theme on viola that will be developed further in the next movement and return as a coda to the finale. The second movement, bearing a D minor key signature, is a very free ternary design, spinning long solitary lines of melody that are dominated by the well-known Wagner 'Tristan' motif of rising minor sixth followed by stepwise descent used also in the finale of the Fifteenth Symphony. The middle section of this movement (in A major) takes up the theme briefly introduced in the coda of the first movement, becoming a tender serenade-like cantilena that will resurface at the end of the quartet. (Shostakovich disparagingly referred to this passage as his 'Italian bit' at a play-through of the quartet with him filling in the missing second violin part at the piano.)

Following the slow movement's reprise, the secretive main theme of the *Allegretto* finale emerges from its melancholic ruminations on the note C sharp without a break – a familiar enough transitional device in the Shostakovich quartets. Unlike the preceding movements, it is difficult to trace any schematic formal plan, although elements of passacaglia (at the outset) and sonata-

like balanced repetition do occur, if only fragmentarily. Better to view it as a tripartite fantasy which gradually finds its way back to the reflective music of the slow movement in an extended coda. The twelve-bar theme, using all but one note of the chromatic scale, initiates a passacaglia-like opening section, which introduces a lyrical counter-melody or 'second subject' over its stuttering repeated notes in groups of three quavers. Then the cellist explosively leads off what becomes an extended middle section of frenetic activity *forte* to *fortissimo* that discharges itself into a strenuous passage of *Klangfarbenmelodie* in which pairs of notes are passed from one instrument to another in an ever-changing re-interpretation of the original twelve-bar theme. (Here is an avant-garde technique deriving from Webern that was to be further explored to frightening effect in Shostakovich's last quartet.) The gruff climax leads to a partial recapitulation of the main theme *fortissimo* on the cello and on, via the above-mentioned quotation from *Lady Macbeth*, to extended self-communings on violin and viola in long-drawn-out passages of elegiac instrumental recitative. Further condensed recollections of the main thematic material now close in on the final section and the emotional stability of F sharp major. The wheel has come full circle and the whole quartet ends in a mood of introspective

nostalgia as the cellist reflects chiefly on the serenade music of the slow movement, with the anxious pulsations of the restless main theme of the finale now laid gently to rest. The quartet received its first performance at the hands of the Beethoven Quartet on 12 November 1973 in the Glinka Concert Hall, Leningrad.

CD5: String Quartets Nos 5 & 15
String Quartet No. 5, Op. 92 in B flat major belongs to that clutch of works (with the Fourth Quartet and First Violin Concerto) which the composer withheld from public performance after the infamous Zhdanov Decree. This was hardly a propitious time for the unveiling of serious chamber music, and with his livelihood at stake the heavily censured composer was taking no chances. The work was completed on 1 November 1952 but had to wait until 13 November 1953 for its premiere – nearly seven years since a new quartet by Shostakovich (No. 3) had been heard in Moscow. The death of Stalin earlier that year had begun to open doors to a greater freedom of creative expression as Soviet Russia stood on the brink of 'the Thaw'. In December an even more important Shostakovich première was to take place in Leningrad – that of the epic Tenth Symphony, the first new symphony by the composer to be heard for more than eight years.

The Fifth Quartet is a substantial, even symphonic work. Running to a playing time of over thirty minutes it dwarfs its comparatively slight predecessor and it bears finger-prints that point towards the Tenth Symphony. Here, for example, in bar 2 of the first movement, is the composer's musical signature D-S-C-H in the same rhythm and register of the re-ordered notes as they appear in the main theme of the symphony's third movement. From an autobiographical point of view, the composer introduces into both works a significant thematic cross-reference to the names of two young women pupils with whom he was at the time emotionally involved – the composer Galina Ustvoltskaia and the pianist Elmira Nazirova. In the symphony it is Elmira whose initials yield a repeated horn motif E-A-E-D-A in the third movement; in the present quartet Shostakovich's infatuation takes the form of a direct quote – at the climax of the development of the first movement – of a theme from the clarinet trio by Ustvoltskaia. This theme continues to exert its presence, both in the first movement's coda and in particular as a cyclic event at a corresponding structural point (re-transition) in the third movement sonata-rondo. But the significance of these allusions goes beyond the autobiographical in the musico-dramatic enrichment of each work. In both cases what at first appears as a thematically unmotivated



external event becomes absorbed into the musical argument. The other aspect that links quartet and symphony is the unusual intensity of strenuous, comprehensive development in the outer movements of the chamber work, the almost orchestral density of texture pulling strongly against the conventional proportions, sonorities and intimate exchanges of the medium. The Fifth Quartet – although in three movements only – is a large-limbed work on the grand scale; the opening sonata-allegro movement (complete with a classical repeat of the exposition) is balanced by an extended (cyclic) sonata-rondo finale. The central *Andante*, to which both movements are linked, is an extended song form (here are the intimate exchanges of true quartet writing) with a yearning second subject that verges on the unashamedly nostalgic.

String Quartet No. 15, Op. 144 in E flat minor relates, of course, to the composer's other late period productions – especially the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Symphonies – and, like them, its style is characterised by the composer's extraordinary assimilation of Schoenberg's twelve-note aesthetic into his own tonal orientation. The conception is an unusually bold one, even allowing for the formal innovations of the previous three quartets. Abandoning the traditional four-movement sonata-cycle form, the composer

presents here an interlinked suite of six *Adagios*, each with the same metronome mark. (The latter is a device used previously in the Quartet No. 13, which closes with a crescendo *ppp-sfff* shriek that now becomes the starting point for the terrifying *Klangfarbenmelodie* of the Serenade.) The Epilogue is a large coda in which recurring stormy cadenzas enfold the successive return of thematic elements from each of the previous five movements. The whole quartet begins with a slow liturgical fugue (shades of Beethoven's Op. 131) based on two subjects, minor and major, of the most elemental simplicity: time here stands still, and continues to do so in the opposing – and frequently startling – immediacy of each successive movement. The sustained intensity of this envoi to the quartet medium is remarkable for a composer in such frail health as Shostakovich then found himself. Richard Taruskin called it 'a racking medley of *Adagios*' in which 'he fashioned his personal pain and his pessimism into a tour de force'. The scheme may not be entirely without precedent in the history of the medium – both Haydn's *Seven Last Words* and Berg's *Lyric Suite* suggest certain parallels – but the bleak austerity and challenging directness of this quartet make it an incomparable experience.

The work was due to be presented by the Beethoven Quartet but received its first performance at the hands of the young Taneyev

Quartet in Leningrad on 15 November 1974: this came about through a delay occasioned by the death of Sergey Shirinsky, the original cellist of the Beethoven Quartet. The latter Quartet was nevertheless able to give the Moscow première with a replacement cellist on 11 January 1975.

CD6: String Quartets Nos 1, 12 & Piano Quintet

The four movements of **String Quartet No. 1, Op. 49 in C major** are shaped and ordered according to classical precedent. A songful, tenderly reflective first movement (with its playful *glissando* second subject) is followed by variations on a folk-like theme in A minor. The muted scherzo comes next, in the surprising key of C sharp minor, enclosing an impish (yet at the same time touchingly nostalgic) trio in the subdominant major. A boisterous and highly concentrated sonata-allegro brings the quartet to a close in a manner that recalls the Prokofiev of the Classical Symphony. In the sharp banter of this movement, key tumbles recklessly after key without endangering its celebratory return to C major. The work was given its first performance by the Glazunov Quartet in Leningrad on 10 October 1938. The following month on 16 November it was premiered in Moscow by the Beethoven Quartet with such public success that it had to be repeated in its entirety as an encore.

String Quartet No. 12, Op. 133 in D flat major is a symphony in all but name, and the composer regarded it as such. In a characteristic polemic written at the time of its UK premiere (at Aldeburgh on 27 June 1970) the music critic and Schoenberg publicist, Hans Keller, even went so far as to claim that Shostakovich had modelled the work on Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony³; to which the composer, thus challenged, went no further in his response than to acknowledge certain parallels. In 1968, when the quartet was composed, Shostakovich had indeed 'discovered' (or perhaps more accurately 'rediscovered') Schoenberg, and the work was his first extended piece to adopt – and freely adapt to his own expressive purpose – the twelve-note method developed so influentially (as most famously in the case of 'late period' Stravinsky) by this radical figure in twentieth-century music. What is interesting is that in this quartet tonality and atonality, consonance and the most extreme dissonance are set against each other in a symbolic struggle for ascendance, presenting a (consciously intended on the part of the composer?) Beethovenian scenario in which the world of high ideals finally triumphs over the powers of darkness. In using a 'formalistic' compositional device Shostakovich thus managed to give the quartet 'content' and meaning. The musico-dramatic structure of



the quartet falls into two parts. The stormy theme that launches the second part is preceded by the calm D flat tonality of the first movement which, significantly enough, contains a pointed allusion to the first of Beethoven's Rasumovsky Quartets and opens with an angular twelve-note theme which assumes the function of a linking motto theme. The action fades into a funereal *Adagio* and – via a long and strenuous accompanied cadenza for the first violin – the gradual recovery of D flat major and the music of the first movement. And now the turbulent theme of the *Allegretto* is transformed into a figure of increasingly joyous affirmation and the quartet ends, *Egmont*-like, in a triumphant assertion of the home key.

The Twelfth Quartet was the second of four late string quartets dedicated to members of the Beethoven Quartet – in this case to the leader, D.M. Tsiganov – and the work was successfully premiered by them in Leningrad on 14 September 1968 after a no less successful unveiling to professional colleagues in Moscow earlier that year on 14 June.

Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 57, composed in 1940, was expressly written for the composer to play with the Beethoven Quartet. This quintet was Shostakovich's first large-scale chamber work, the precedent for a series of important war-time pieces in the genre that included the Second Piano Trio

and the Second and Third String Quartets. Its five-movement layout was to prove a favourite scheme with the composer in both quartet and symphony, but despite its scale it is neither strenuous nor disturbing, its moods are essentially contemplative, genial and lyrical. And the composer's imaginative sense of texture, his feeling for the interplay of piano and strings, is immediately apparent in the opening pair of movements. This pair comprises a sonorous Prelude (in which is enfolded a gentle dance) leading into a slow, reflective Fugue that begins with strings only. This Prelude and Fugue (which Prokofiev, incidentally, found a little too 'Bachian' for his taste) is a self-contained 'form within a form', making an original beginning to the cycle. Placed at the centre of the composition, in welcome opposition to this sad G minor tranquillity, is the boisterous, assertive Scherzo in B major. The gravely-stepping Intermezzo (D minor) serves as a transition to the bright G major Finale which in its progress recaptures something of the physical energy and glittering sonority of the Scherzo. Towards the close we are reminded once more of the reflective spirit of the first part of the quintet before returning to the carefree, Schubertian simplicity of the Finale's prevalent mood, in which vein it leaves us with a casual shrug of the shoulders. The Piano Quintet won for its composer great acclaim: a Stalin Prize and

many performances followed its successful Moscow premiere on 23 November 1940.

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¹ In a BBC Radio 3 broadcast on 15 January 1977

² See Derek C. Hulme, *Dmitri Shostakovich – A Catalogue, Bibliography and Discography*, Oxford 1991, p. 182

³ See 'Shostakovich discovers Schoenberg' in *The Listener*, 8 October 1970

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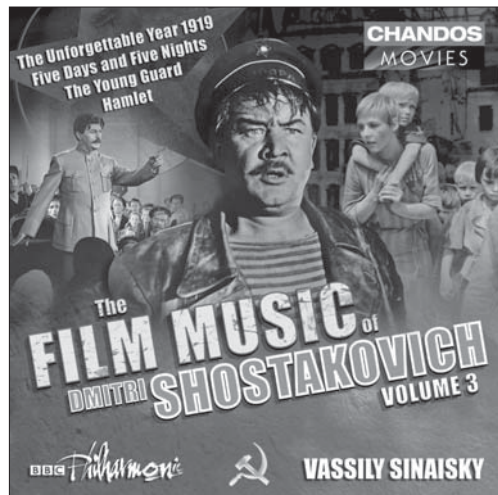
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Martin Roscoe was for six years a professor of piano at the Royal Academy of Music, where he now holds an Honorary Associateship. Artistic Director of the Beverley Chamber Music Festival, he also initiated and directs the Ribbles Valley International Piano Week, and has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Music from the University of Hull.



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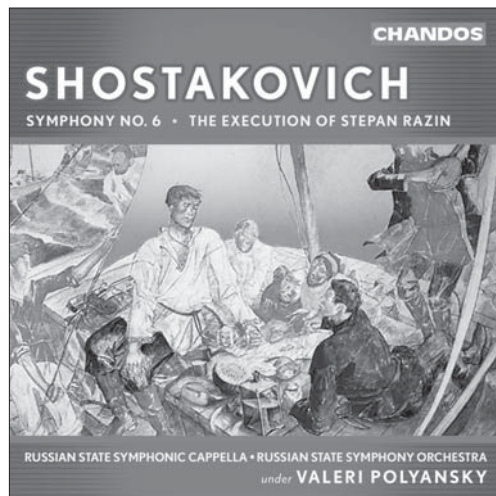


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Telephone: + 44 (0)1206 225 200 Fax: + 44 (0)1206 225 201

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Sound engineer Jonathan Cooper

Assistant engineers Christopher Brooke (Nos 8, 9, 13), Matthew Walker (Nos 2, 14), Michael Common (Nos 1, 5, 12, 15, Piano Quintet)

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Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Complete String Quartets

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TT 431:12

Sorrel Quartet

Gina McCormack *violin*Catherine Yates *violin*Vicci Wardman *viola* (CDs 1 & 2)Sarah-Jane Bradley *viola*Helen Thatcher *cello*

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