

BEETHOVEN BARTÓK NOW

welcome to **BBN: Night Music**

Solem
LATES

Bartók's Quartet no. 5 is drenched in the folk language of Eastern Europe with which the composer was so enamoured. Tonight we perform the first three movements of this five movement quartet, written in 1934. The first and third movements (*Allegro* and *Scherzo alla Bulgarese*) display clear references to the folk dances and rhythms Bartók would have heard in villages; though it is in the second movement *Adagio molto* where the heart of this quartet lies. Depicting the warm, buzzing yet lonely atmosphere of the Hungarian plains, this music is a clear example of Bartók's Night Music style, and gives tonight's concert its title.

Written in 1826, Beethoven's Quartet no. 13 in Bb major opus 130 is the second of the late quartets. His last major completed compositions, these works collectively transformed Western music and still provide audiences and interpreters alike with an intense emotional experi-

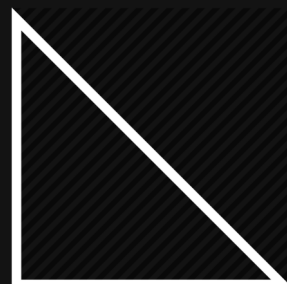
ence as well as an intellectual challenge. Unusual in its six-movement form, op. 130 is bookended by two monumental movements between which lie four middle movements – subversive in their caricatured vividness, their variety of scope, and their jolting shifts in character. We will perform three of these middle movements tonight: ii. Presto, iv. Alla danza tedesca, and v. Cavatina.

Completing the programme is tuoretu by Aaron Parker (b.1991), specially commissioned for Beethoven Bartók Now and receiving its world premiere this evening. Across five fragile movements, Parker's music never seems to settle quite in the real world (much like the title and movement titles which are words created by the composer), existing instead somewhere in the ether – an effect enhanced using prepared instruments combined with loop pedals which repeat and fragment the music, creating an expansive sonic palette.


Bartók	i. Allegro
Beethoven	iv. Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai
Bartók	ii. Adagio molto

Parker	<i>tuoretu</i>
	i. slämt fizzy, hesitant (with cautious abandon)
	ii. óqeersqe rushing, headlong, yet hushed and distant
	iii. lutmtóut strict and mechanical
	iv. easqelä suspended, spacious, in a dusky half light
	v. mróuter rapid, light and skittish - like snatches of a folk tune.

Beethoven	v. Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo
Bartók	iii. Scherzo alla Bulgarese
Beethoven	ii. Presto



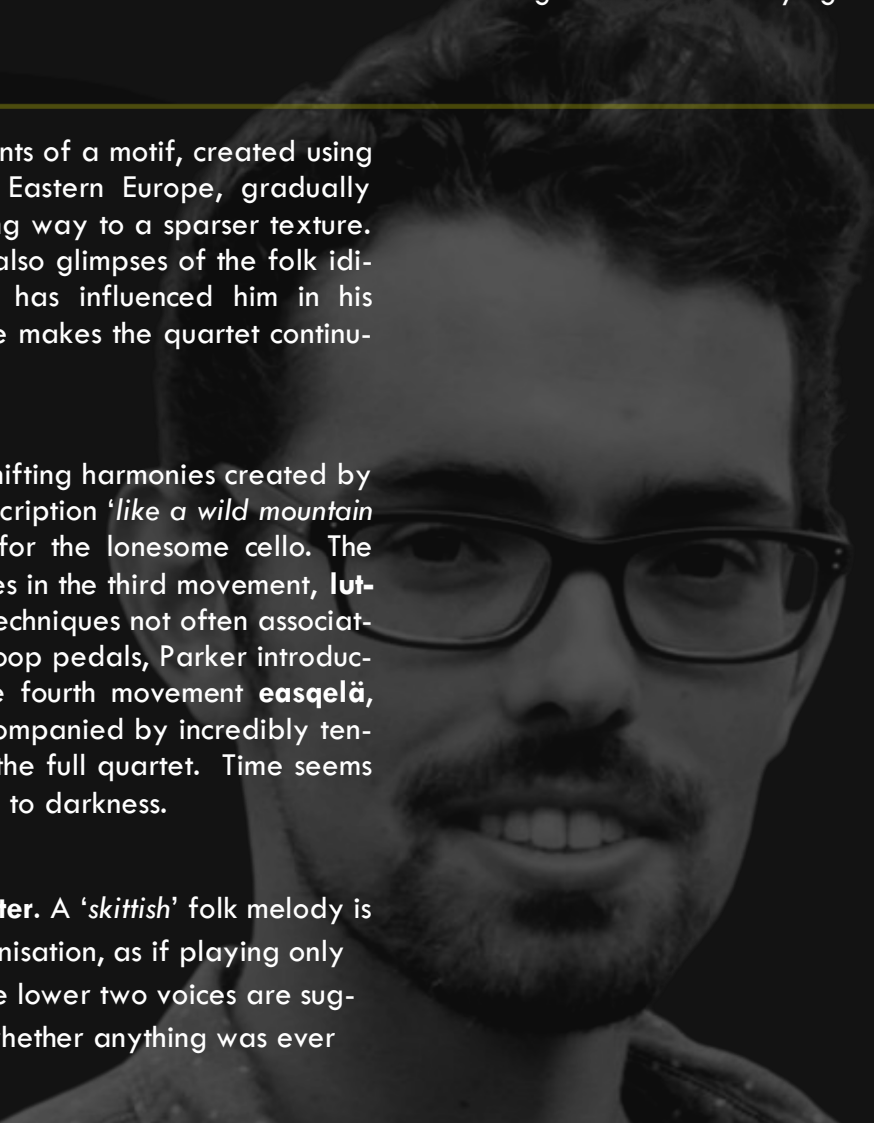
Tonight we perform movements from these works in a playlist form...the programme notes below are your guide through this evening's musical journey - its scenes, colours & atmospheres.



The opening of the first movement **Allegro** of Bartók's Quartet no. 5 begins with a clarion call. This energetic sweep played in unison by the four players, is set in dichotomy throughout the movement against moments of sinewy melody, hinting at the eery darkness to come later in the quartet. Created in an arch-like or mirror-image form, this movement unfurls itself around a rustic section which owes a debt of gratitude to the time Bartók spent cultivating his compositional voice in the fields and villages of Eastern Europe. From his early twenties onwards, Bartók collected and recorded music from the people of these areas, armed with a phonograph, his pen and notepad, and an unbounded curiosity – the results of which fed into his composing process.

Ending with a defiant gesture similar to its opening, the Bartók **Allegro** gives way to Beethoven's **Alla danza Tedesca** from op 130. In what should feel like a straightforward 'dance in a German style', the dynamic and phrasing markings which Beethoven adds transform this piece into what could be at times some sort of grotesque caricature of a masked ball where we swirl among the dancers, or at others, a dreamlike sequence.

Though Bartók never used 'Night Music' to directly describe his music, it is a term he endorsed. This **Adagio molto** contains the hallmarks of this style: emerging from a bleak and sparse environment established in the opening, lonely human melodies call from the darkness, and are set against a backdrop of harmonies and noises reminiscent of buzzing insects and scurrying animals.



Aaron Parker's **tuóretu** begins with **slämt**: fragments of a motif, created using harmonies which nod towards jazz as well as Eastern Europe, gradually emerge into a fully formed sequence before giving way to a sparser texture. We hear percussive and atmospheric sounds but also glimpses of the folk idiom harking back to Bartók, who Parker says has influenced him in his "approach to folk-like material and in the way he makes the quartet continually evolve".

In the movement which follows, **óqeersqe**, subtly shifting harmonies created by the three upper instruments – marked with the description '*like a wild mountain stream seen from afar*' – provides a backdrop for the lonesome cello. The idea of a figure set within an environment continues in the third movement, **lutmtóut**. Establishing a soundworld created using techniques not often associated with string instruments in combination with the loop pedals, Parker introduces the solo viola '*yearning, spacious, lyrical*'. The fourth movement **easqelä**, reuses that very same solo line – but this time accompanied by incredibly tender, warm, and spacious harmonies provided by the full quartet. Time seems to stand still as the movement transitions from dusk to darkness.

The piece ends with a quicksilver movement, **mróuter**. A 'skittish' folk melody is played by the violins, who soon fall out of synchronisation, as if playing only to themselves. Whispers of melodic ideas from the lower two voices are suggested but end abruptly – leaving us to wonder whether anything was ever actually there.

Our final section of the evening begins with the heart of Beethoven's monumental op 130. Originating in opera, the term **Cavatina** here refers to the song-like nature of the piece, a simple tune with accompaniment. This music though is deep and rich, moving and profound, all the more touching and human because of its simplicity and vulnerability. A brief diversion in the centre of the movement is marked *beklemmt*, oppressed, heavy of heart; the first violin part seems desperate, clutching at strands of melody - like a singer gasping for breath and yet never quite achieving the capability to sing. At times in this movement it feels like even music isn't enough to express the inner thoughts of a fragile human mind.

We return to Bartók with the central **Scherzo** movement from the Quartet no. 5. This is human, like Beethoven, but here is a celebration of community rather than a depiction of the deeply personal. Dancers joyfully collide into each other attempting to dance to this lopsided Bulgarian beat established in the cello pizzicato at the start of the movement. One feels almost transported to the centre of this night-time scene, thrown among the twirls of figures and flashes of fire, the music swirling in 360 degrees around us. In the middle of this we are taken to a contrasting image - insect noises amidst the darkness are heard in the violins before a figure in the darkness sings a yearning folk tune (passed between the viola and cello) which builds to a frantic melee. As this scene disperses, the dancing figures return almost seamlessly - people at one with their surroundings, a living part of the natural world.

One can almost see the glaring eyes in the dark in the opening of this gone-in-a-flash **Presto** movement. The smoky, scurrying, and secretive opening contrasts with a bombastic second section - almost comic in its shift of mood. In the return of the first section, individual instruments within the quartet comment where before there was space, perhaps trying to escape the irresistible forward momentum of the music.



Praised for their “cultured tone” (Arts Desk), The Solem Quartet has established itself as one of the most innovative and adventurous quartets of its generation. A 2020 awardee of the Jerwood Arts Live Work Fund, the Solem Quartet takes its place amongst some of the UK's brightest artistic voices. Winners of the prestigious Royal Over-Seas League Ensemble Competition in 2014, they enjoy a busy concert schedule ranging from performances at venues such as London's Wigmore and Queen Elizabeth Halls, to international chamber music festivals and tours in Europe and Asia.

Passionate about collaborating with the composers of their time, the Quartet have worked closely with Anna Meredith, Colin Matthews and Thomas Adès and recently gave the UK premiere of Jonny Greenwood's Suite from “There Will be Blood” (for string quartet) at the V&A Museum. Their groundbreaking series ‘Solem Lates’ was created in 2019, with the aim of presenting classical music in a fresh way and reaching broader audiences. Their projects have included bringing music for quartet + electronics to nightclubs around the UK, performing Bartok's 3rd Quartet from memory, and collaborating with Picturehouse Cinemas to bring Yorgos Lanthimos' *The Lobster* to life through live score performances alongside the iconic film.

Begun in 2021, their *Beethoven Bartók Now* project presents the works of these two giants alongside 6 major commissions, often collaborating with other artists and performers to bring new life to the music. One of the surrounding components of this far-reaching project is *Writing for Quartet*, generously supported by the Royal Philharmonic Society, a biannual workshop for composers of all backgrounds.

Since 2016 they have been Quartet in Residence at the University of Liverpool as well as Ensemble in Residence at Aberystwyth MusicFest.

The Solem Quartet are extremely grateful for financial assistance for *Beethoven Bartók Now* from PRS Composers' Fund, Royal Philharmonic Society Enterprise Fund, Jerwood Arts' Live Work Fund, The Marchus Trust, Peter & Veronica Lofthouse and Carol Nixon, as well as generous support from number of individual donors. We are also grateful to Jordana & Tom at St. Giles and the team of volunteers for their help in putting together this evening's concert.

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