

BEETHOVEN BARTÓK NOW

Solem
LATES

TRINITY LABAN

welcome to **BBN: Song & Dance**

What draws us to great art - however refined - is its ability to touch a shared human understanding: our elemental longing to communicate, to commemorate and celebrate through art, and specifically song and dance.

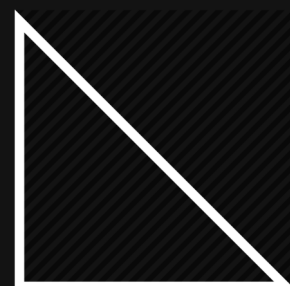
Beethoven's Quartet no. 12 in Eb major, op. 127, composed in 1825, is the first of the much revered 'late quartets'. These genre-defining works represent some of the most intellectually challenging, academically cultured, and groundbreaking music ever written for the string quartet. But, more importantly, they have the ability to pull at us with extreme emotional directness. Tonight's performance will feature the singing first movement *Maestoso-Allegro*, and the third movement *Scherzo Vivace*, full of dance-inspired motifs.

Bartók's Quartet no. 4 directly displays that human connection to music, celebrating, as it does, the folk music of the peoples of Eastern Europe. By the time of writing this


quartet in 1928, Bartók was immersed in collecting, recording and studying the folk music of his native Hungary, as well as Romania, Bulgaria, and further afield. The rhythms and energy of dance are central to the *Prestissimo* and *Allegretto* movements heard tonight, and perhaps most clearly in the foot-stomping finale, *Allegro molto*. The heart of the work, though, is the soulful *Non troppo lento*, where a solo cello sings a melody into a dark and lonely environment.

Completing the programme is the world premiere of *Hitogata (Human Shape)* by **Jasmine Morris** (b.2001), a winner of the 2021 BBN: Call for Scores. Taking the dance form of *butoh* - and in particular, the work of that genre's leading exponent, Kazuo Ohno (1906-2010) - as her starting point, Morris combines live string sound with electronic manipulation to create buzzing soundscapes across three movements.

Beethoven	i. Maestoso-Allegro
Bartók	ii. Prestissimo, con sordino
Morris	i. Non-seeing eyes
Morris	ii. Gazing with human hands
Bartók	iii. Non troppo lento
Beethoven	iii. Scherzando Vivace
Morris	iii Dancing Bodies (Admiring La Argentina)
Bartók	iv. Allegretto pizzicato
Bartók	v. Allegro molto



Tonight we perform these works in playlist form, including newly composed transitional material by Alex Cho and Yulia Temnova, as well as improvisations created by the musicians and dancers. The notes below are your guide through this evening's musical journey...



The grand and heroic opening of the first movement, marked **Maestoso**, belies the true heart of the movement - a tender, and gentle **Allegro** (played at first by the solo quartet) with singing and flowing melodies. Beethoven recalls the grand **Maestoso** theme twice more, but, unexpectedly, the music seems to become translucent at the end of the movement, disappearing into the air.

As the songful melodies evaporate, we are thrown into the dancing, nocturnal world of Bartók's **Prestissimo con sordino**. The scurrying motifs and accented off-beats together with the veiled sound (created by the four muted - *con sordino* - instruments), create a sense of nervousness, discomfort and heightened awareness. Alex Cho's transitional music deftly takes us into an even darker and murkier world - as murmuring electronics appear as if from the undergrowth.

In Morris's **Non-seeing eyes**, the quartet players are asked to remove a key element of their communication, sight - and instead rely solely on their aural awareness, an idea directly inspired by Kazuo Ohno's writings on *butoh*, and reflected here in the dancers' movement. The music transitions from the opening viola solo, marked *ethereal*, into a more agitated state as each instrument enters.

The electronic sounds subside gradually, taking us into the second movement, **Gazing with human hands**. Here, movement controls the music, as signals from the dancers denote musical changes to the performers; shifts of harmony and texture create a rich, ever-morphing soundworld.

Performers and sounds gradually fade away, leaving the solo first violin on a singular, lonely note. As a chord rekindles from within the quartet, the solo cello begins a singing, yearning melody marking the beginning of Bartók's **Non troppo lento**. An example of the composer's 'Night Music' style, the music combines the background hum of a night-time atmosphere, with bird-like tweets, howling wolves, and new sounds around every corner.

Beginning in the same world as the Bartók, Yulia Temnova's music takes us into a dark disturbing world of dense harmonies, before joyously exploding into the opening of Beethoven's **Scherzando Vivace**. While there is a sort of courtly-dance refined beauty in the outer sections of this movement, there is also a hint of the *primaeval* in the central trio section. A disturbing, demonic dance explodes into raucous celebration; fiendishly difficult, especially for the first violin, its blink-and-you'll-miss-it detail has the listener clutching for more.

The return of the electronic world sound signifies the opening of Morris' **Dancing Bodies**, subtitled **Admiring La Argentina**. Kazuo Ohno's dance piece of the same name was itself inspired in part by the flamenco dancer Antonia Mercé (known as *La Argentina*), and so the music mimics the flamboyant guitar sounds of flamenco music, re-imagined here for solo cello. The cello here takes on an almost possessed character - not unlike the trio in the previous Beethoven movement. After building to a climactic sequence, the musical elements are subtracted, returning to residual elements from the cello's opening solo.

A fully improvised scene change from all performers takes us back to the infectious dance rhythms of Bartók's **Allegretto pizzicato** (plucked). The so-called 'Bartók pizz', where the string smacks against the wood of the fingerboard creating an audible snap, adds a percussive texture - and sense of abrupt disruption - to this music. As the *pizzicato* fades elegantly, we are immediately launched into the finale of the Bartók, **Allegro molto**. Despite its sometimes raw and dissonant harmonies, the music is overwhelmingly celebratory. Dance rhythms and folk tunes pile onto one another; musicians and dancers bring the listener into the maelstrom of bodies swinging, twirling, and colliding in a joyful celebration - an interconnected world of song and dance.

Performers and creative team

Solem Quartet

Amy Tress
William Newell
Stephen Upshaw
Stephanie Tress

Trinity Laban CoLab dancers + musicians

Aimée Ruhinda
Hannah Knowles
Leah Wallace
Siyu Shen
Jiyun Zhang
Simone Ciccarelli
Juan Carlos Romero Monteagudo
Chung Utor Wong
Meg Allen
Tak-Hon Arthur Chan

Live electronics

Jasmine Morris

Transitional music

Alex Cho
Yulia Temnova

Dance mentor

Ellen van Schuylenburch

Lighting

Malcolm Richards

Sound

Ben Leigh-Grosart

with thanks to

Mitch Tam, Joe Townsend, Hannah Benton,
Sally Richardson (Tashmina Artists)

Solem Quartet



photo Matthew Johnson

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Praised for their “immaculate precision and spirit” (The Strad) and “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 Bartók’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.

‘The Four Quarters’, the Solem Quartet’s debut album, was released on Orchid Classics in September 2021. Using Thomas Adès’ *The Four Quarters* as a framework – and featuring several arrangements by the ensemble – this CD explores composers’ depictions of night and day and all the moments in between.

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.

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