

Spotlight: Caroline Shaw Quartets

Leydecker Quartet and Osian Ensemble

Plan and Elevation *i. The Ellipse ii. The Cutting Garden iii. The Herbaceous Border iv. The Orangery v. The Beech Tree*

The title refers to two standard ways of representing architecture – an orthographic (or bird’s eye perspective (plan)) and a side view which features ornamental detail (elevation). It is also a metaphor for one’s path in any endeavour — often the actual journey and results are quite different, and perhaps more elevated, than the original plan. Caroline Shaw wrote this string quartet for the 75th anniversary of Dumbarton Oaks, after her time as music fellow from 2014 to 2015. Plan & Elevation examines different parts of the estate’s beautiful grounds and her personal experience in those spaces. *The Ellipse* – the notion of repetition is explored in this movement, as she used to walk along stone paths under hornbeams to clear her head. *The Cutting Garden* – this movement includes a mixture of string quartet references (Mozart, Ravel, Debussy, Shaw), symbolising the variety of flowers before they are cut for displays. *The Herbaceous Border* – at first this movement is spare and strict like French formal gardens, and then things lead to chaos. *The Orangery* – this movement was inspired by shadows in a room, cast by light shining through a fig vine. *The Beech Tree* – this movement reflects her favourite spot in the garden, which she describes as strong, simple, ancient, elegant, and quiet. **Performed by Leydecker Quartet.**

The Evergreen *i. Moss ii. Stem iii. Water iv. Root*

“The Evergreen” is a captivating and atmospheric quartet written in 2020 by Caroline Shaw. It explores themes of nature’s resilience and enduring beauty. The idea for the quartet was conceived on a walk she embarked on in an evergreen forest in Gailano Island. Shaw’s use of intricate yet powerful harmonies and delicate melodies beautifully captures the essence of an evergreen tree, standing tall and strong throughout changing seasons. The music takes listeners on a journey through different parts of the tree. The first, *Moss*, combines glassy harmonics with gauzy tremolo to create a still forest scene. Shaw was inspired by the Pacific Northwest Forest, and talks about a still silence that one can notice “little tiny bits” in, such as moss: “soft, but incredibly complex beneath the surface”. *Stem* contains a consistent rhythmic pulse passed around the quartet. Shaw says “as a listener, I want something that’s strong and rising. That’s where the idea came – something that has a very clear structure and strength to it.” For water, we explore the world of pizzicato to create the effects of droplets of pure water. Shaw heard this effect on her walk and was immersed by the sound world. The final movement, *Root*, has several meanings. It’s the last part of a tree, which is the most important part but also gestures towards the idea of basso continuo played at the start by the cello and further developed throughout. You can hear soaring melodies like birds taking flight throughout. We hope you enjoy our interpretation of The Evergreen.

Performed by Osian Ensemble.

Leydecker Quartet

The Leydecker Quartet is a newly formed string quartet, playing together since the beginning of 2024. This is their debut concert, as part of RNCM’s “future is green” concert series.

Violin I – Elanor Leydecker

Violin II – Ola Stanton

Viola – Georgie Bloomfield

Cello – Maisie McLoughlin

Osian Ensemble

The Osian Ensemble, formed in 2023, is a chamber collective that come together to provide a performance platform to all musicians, with the ability to expand and decrease to allow for opportunities for all.

Performers: Jacob Wright, Lizzie Dawson, Kirin Howat, Rhys Nicholson

