Spitalfields music festival

Consone Quartet

Friday 4th July 2025 | St Mary-le-Bow

Henry Purcell (arr. Benjamin Britten)
Chacony

Joseph Haydn
String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 33, No. 2

Oliver Leith
On a horse, on a hill, faraway, through fog and bonfire
i. On a horse, on a hill, faraway, through fog and bonfire
ii. Flamberge
iii. Crowd at the bonfire
iv. Horse breath and muzzle smoke
v. The Departing Glance
vi. Moonshadow on Dirge Hill
vii. Forever gallop

Robert Schumann
String Quartet in A minor, Op. 41. No. 1

Agata Daraškaitė	Violin
Magdalena Loth-Hill	Violin
Elitsa Bogdanova	Viola
George Ross	Cello

On a horse, on a hill, faraway, through fog and bonfire.

This quartet is seven endings – or different perspectives of the same end; close ups, swooping, rolling oil landscapes and glimpses. The focal point of this is a figure, on a horse, on a hill, faraway, through fog and bonfire. They have a sword, a decorative undulating blade hanging by side, the horse breathing plumes of steam like a cannon after the shot. The horse gallops on the same spot as the moon circles a smooth tall hill, almost cartoon-like. Between you and the hill, a muffled crowd are lit by bonfire, unaware of the big farewell. It is a romantic end, an impossibly romantic goodbye that lingers, storied rather than reality, a look back from the distance. A hero or a love, looks back before leaving or returning.

The image started as a look at the idea of the chaconne, a 'form' that, over centuries has been pulled through bushes of different shapes, to become a feeling more than a codified thing. Many might disagree, fine with me, not a battle I'm willing to fight, there is no triple time here, more the pursuit of a feeling. It is an embrace of intensity and heightenedness. The lilt of three might be a horse stuck in step. There are familiar chaconne tropes, repetitions, descending drooping laments, but those things are more about a feeling than they are form. Like the figure, the chaconne is in the distance.

The first period instrument string quartet to be selected as BBC New Generation Artists, the **Consone Quartet** are fast making a name for themselves with their honest and expressive interpretations of repertoire, notably from the classical and romantic eras. Formed at the Royal College of Music in London, the Consone Quartet launched their professional career in 2015, shortly after which they were awarded two prizes at the 2015 York Early Music International Young Artists Competition, including the EUBO Development Trust Prize and a place on the EEEmerging Scheme in France. They went on to win the 2016 Royal Over-Seas League Ensemble Prize, and in 2022 were awarded a prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust (BBT) fellowship.

The quartet has been enthusiastically received at London's major venues, as well as further afield in Poland, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Bulgaria and Slovenia. Festival invitations include Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Dartington, Two Moors, Buxton, MA Festival in Bruges, Heidelberger Streichquartettfest, and Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Germany. In 2024 the quartet returned to the English Haydn Festival and the York Early Music Festival, both of which are loyal supporters and regularly host the group. Consone are Artists-in- Residence at Paxton House (2023-2025) and at Saxon Shore Early Music Kenardington (2024-2027). Following tours of South America (2018) and Canada (2023) the quartet will return to North America in 2025 to perform both alone and in collaboration with pianist Kristian Bezuidenhout. 2023

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saw the Consone Quartet premiere a new work for string sextet by Gavin Bryars, commissioned by friends of the Quartet, the Borletti-Buitoni Trust and BBC Radio 3. The work, entitled "The Bridges of Königsberg", was broadcast on Radio 3 from St Martin-in-the-Fields in October 2023.

Education work remains a core interest to the group, having worked with students at the Royal College of Music in London, Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, as Hans Keller fellows for 2020-2022. 2024 sees the beginning of a new partnership with the Frost Trust as "Visiting Quartet" at Sheffield's Music in the Round. The quartet's debut recording explored music by Haydn and Mendelssohn and was described by The Strad as an album "that instantly leaps out of the stereo at you as something special." In Spring 2023 they released the first CD in a complete cycle of Mendelssohn's string quartets with Linn Records. The album, featuring both the '1823' and Op. 44 No. 3 quartets, has been described as 'top-notch' (Allmusic) and 'exquisite' (Pizzicato)

Oliver Leith (b.1990) is a London-based composer. He writes music that is "deadpan, subversive, quietly anarchic, disarmingly heart-sore and sweet-sour" (BBC Radio 3, Kate Molleson), which has been performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Ilan Volkov, the LA Philharmonic, Royal Northern Sinfonia, London Sinfonietta, members of the Philharmonia Orchestra, EXAUDI, and Trio Catch.

His works have appeared at the BBC Proms, Tanglewood Music Centre, Wigmore Hall, Aix Festival, Transit Festival, the Darmstädter Ferienkurse, Heidelberg Festival, Riga's White Night Festival and Liszt Academy (Budapest). Accolades include an Ivor Novello award for Honey Siren (2019), a 2016 British Composer Award for A Day at The Spa, premiered by Kaleidoscope Saxophone Quartet, and the 2014 RPS Composer Prize.

He was previously Guildhall School of Music & Drama's Doctoral Composer-in-Residence at the Royal Opera House. This led to the creation of Leith's acclaimed debut chamber opera Last Days, which premiered at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre in 2022 with a sold-out run of performances; it received its US premiere from the LA Philharmonic and Thomas Adès in February 2024 at Walt Disney Hall.

The 90-minute piece, with a text by Matt Copson and the composer, is based on Gus Van Sant's 2005 film. Last Days traces the self-destructive spiral of a rock star escaped from rehab; its debut production, co-directed by Anna Morrissey and Matt Copson, starred Agathe Rousselle in the non-singing lead role of Blake, with costumes by Balenciaga. The opera features a recording of an Italian verismo-style aria written for Caroline Polachek and produced by Danny L Harle. The world premiere recording with12 Ensemble, GBSR Duo and conductor Jack Sheen was released by Platoon in 2024.

Recent large-scale works include Cartoon Sun, commissioned by the Hallé Concerts Society for Thomas Adès. 2024 also saw the premiere of Doom and the Dooms for electric guitar, keyboard, percussion and strings for Sean Shibe, GBSR Duo and 12 Ensemble. will o wisp, a 19-minute work for strings, was co-commissioned by Manchester Collective and Det Norske Kammerorkester and funded by the British Council's International Collaboration Grants and premiered in 2022.

Other orchestral works include Taxa (composed in 2013 and subsequently performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Ilan Volkov) and Dream Horse for soprano, bass, and chamber orchestra (commissioned by the 2018 Tanglewood Festival, conducted by Thomas Adès). In 2016/17 members of the London Symphony Orchestra premiered 664 love songs to cure heartache and Sexton Blakes, both for instrumental ensembles and video.

Balloon for ensemble of nine players was premiered in 2018 by the London Sinfonietta and features on an all-Leith release from Another Timbre, with Richard Baker conducting Explore Ensemble. good day good day bad day bad day, a 45-minute work for keyboards and percussion composed in 2018 for George Barton and Siwan Rhys, is also available on Another Timbre. Other recordings include Hand Coloured with Loré Lixenberg and the London Sinfonietta (NMC), Aisha Orazbayeva playing Blurry Wake Song (SN Variations) and Uh huh, Yeah – described as a 'miniature masterpiece' by The Times – with the Hermes Experiment (Delphian). The Ruisi Quartet featured Leith's string quartet The big house on their eponymous album from Pentatone in 2023. Ben Goldscheider and Richard Uttley premiered Eeyore for horn and piano at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in November 2024; it tours California as part of the Camerata Pacifica recital series in spring 2025.

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