

# T'ang Quartet

Presents

2023/2024 season

## CHAMBER OF HEROES

A celebration of three titans of classical music who have each made their mark in chamber music.

August 29, 2023 • 7:30pm  
Victoria Concert Hall



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Dear friends, partners and supporters,

We are thrilled to celebrate the brilliance of chamber music's finest composers at this concert. Set against the backdrop of our mission to honour classical era legends while embracing the contributions of contemporary composers, the ensemble will present an enchanting evening featuring the exceptional works of Joseph Haydn, Caroline Shaw, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

The T'ang Quartet has long established itself as a leading exponent of chamber music, showcasing its unwavering commitment to reviving and reinterpreting the masterpieces that have shaped the genre. With a passion for historical significance and modern innovation, the quartet consistently bridges the gap between past and present, offering audiences a unique and diverse musical experience.

The concert promises to be a sublime celebration of three extraordinary composers who have left an indelible mark on the world of chamber music:

**Joseph Haydn** – Revered as the "Father of the String Quartet," Haydn's compositions laid the foundation for the development of chamber music. His intricate and melodious compositions continue to captivate listeners, showcasing his unparalleled craftsmanship and creativity.

**Ludwig van Beethoven** – A true titan of classical music, Beethoven's chamber music compositions effortlessly weave a testament to his genius and

everlasting influence. His ability to convey raw emotion through music has solidified his place as one of the most iconic composers of all time.

**Caroline Shaw** – A contemporary genius, Shaw's works bring a breath of fresh air to the chamber music scene. With her innovative approach and distinct musical voice, Shaw's compositions effortlessly weave together tradition and innovation, making her a perfect fit for T'ang Quartet's dedication to both the classical and modern realms of chamber music. The quartet will play her string quartet, *Plan & Elevation* – a work which was commissioned by Dumbarton Oaks, a historic estate in the Georgetown neighbourhood of Washington, D.C.

The concert will transport the audience on a musical journey that seamlessly connects the past and the present. By performing these diverse works, the quartet pays homage to the rich legacy of chamber music while embracing the innovations that continue to shape the genre.

*We would like to thank our principal donor, Mr Tang Wee Kit, for his kind contributions and support, as well as Synwin Music and See Lian Music.*



Ng Yu-Ying  
1st violin



Ang Chek Meng  
2nd violin



Jamshid Saydikarimov  
Cello



Dandan Wang  
Viola



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## JOSEPH HAYDN

### String Quartet Op 20 No 2 in C Major

1. Moderato
2. Capriccio. Adagio
3. Minuet. Allegretto
4. Fuga a 4 soggetti. Allegro

Haydn's *Opus 20* – his third set of six quartets following his *Opus 7* and *Opus 19* – was the set that defined the string quartet as a medium. And among the astonishing output of 18 string quartets over a period of just three years – a critical milestone in the history of musical composition which earned Haydn the endearing sobriquet, Papa Haydn – the *Op 20 No. 2 in C Major* stands out as a diamond among precious stones.

Musicologist William Drabkin describes this piece as “one of the supreme achievements of the Classical period”.

While there is something to admire in every bar of music on every page of this magnificent string quartet, it is significant that in this work, the four musicians have an equal voice in the musical proceedings, where previously the ideas were mainly carried by the two violins as the viola and cello provided accompaniment.



Image source: @laurence.revol / @carolineadelaideshaw

## CAROLINE SHAW

### Plan & Elevation: The Grounds of Dumbarton Oaks

1. The Ellipse
2. The Cutting Garden
3. The Herbaceous Border
4. The Orangery
5. The Beech Tree

Caroline Adelaide Shaw (born August 1, 1982) is an American composer of contemporary classical music, violinist, and singer. She's best known for the a cappella piece *Partita for 8 Voices*, for which she won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Music. Shaw won the 2022 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for her *Narrow Sea*.

Born in Greenville, North Carolina, Shaw started playing the violin at two. She began writing music at 10, mostly imitating the chamber music of Mozart and Brahms. She focused on violin performance with the aim of becoming an orchestral or chamber musician and received her Bachelor of Music (violin performance) from Rice University in 2004, and her master's degree (violin) from Yale University in 2007. She entered the PhD program in composition in Princeton University in 2010. Shaw's heroic accomplishment arrived when she became the youngest recipient (under 30) of the Pulitzer Prize for Music for her composition *Partita for 8 Voices*.

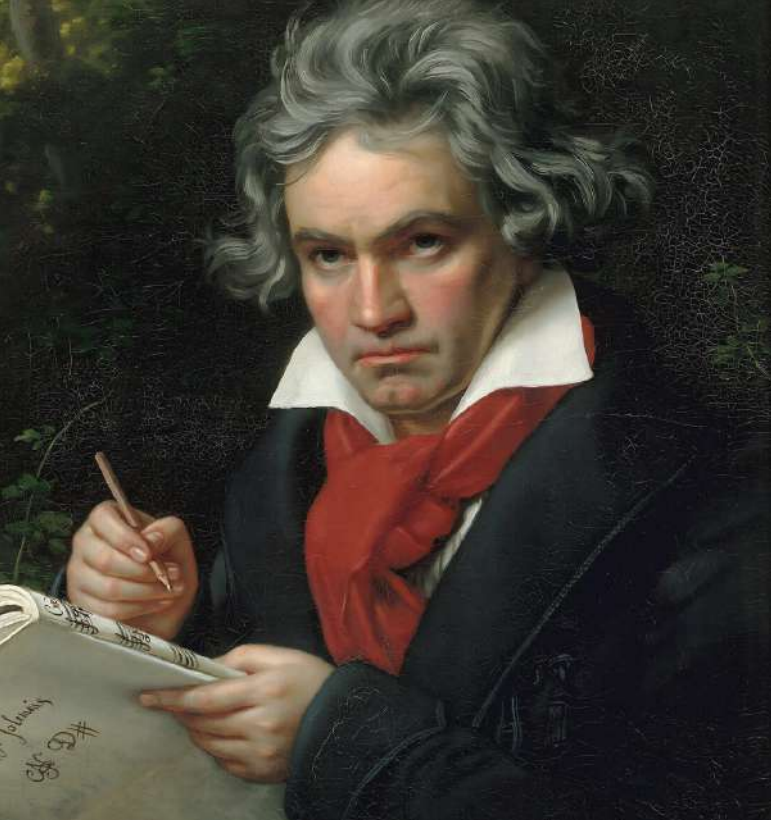
#### In her own words:

I have always loved drawing the architecture around me when travelling, and some of my favourite lessons in musical composition have occurred by chance in my drawing practice over the years. While writing a string quartet to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Dumbarton Oaks, I returned to these essential ideas of space and proportion — to the challenges of trying to represent them on paper. The title, *Plan & Elevation*, refers to two standard ways of representing architecture – essentially an orthographic, or "bird's eye," perspective

("plan"), and a side view which features more ornamental detail ("elevation"). This binary is also a gentle 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. I was fortunate to have been the inaugural music fellow at Dumbarton Oaks in 2014–15. *Plan & Elevation* examines different parts of the estate's beautiful grounds and my personal experience in those particular spaces.

Each movement is based on a simple ground bass line which supports a different musical concept or character. "*The Ellipse*" considers the notion of infinite repetition (I won't deny a tiny Kierkegaard influence here). One can walk around and around the stone path, beneath the trimmed hornbeams, as I often did as a way to clear my mind while writing. The second movement, "*The Cutting Garden*," is a fun fragmentation of various string quartets (primarily Ravel, Mozart K. 387, and my own *Entr'acte*, *Valencia*, and *Punctum*), referencing the variety of flowers grown there before they meet their inevitable end as cuttings for display. "*The Herbaceous Border*" is spare and strict at first, like the cold geometry of French formal gardens with their clear orthogonals (when viewed from the highest point), before building to the opposite of order: chaos.

The fourth movement, "*The Orangery*," evokes the slim, fractured shadows in that room as the light tries to peek through the leaves of the ageing fig vine. We end with my favourite spot in the garden, "*The Beech Tree*." It is strong, simple, ancient, elegant, and quiet; it needs no introduction."



## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

### String Quartet No 10 Op 74 in E-flat Major, "Harp"

1. Poco adagio – Allegro
2. Adagio ma non troppo
3. Presto
4. Allegretto con variazioni

Beethoven's *String Quartet No 10 Op 74* was written in 1809, which was the year of Haydn's passing and the last of his middle period which is often referred to as the Eroica or heroic period with such works as his *Third and Fifth Symphonies*, which reflect heroism and struggle in that duration of the great composer's life, brought on perhaps by the grim realisation that he was starting to go deaf.

It was also an epic year for him, which began with the offer of a position with Napoleon's younger brother Jerome, the newly created King of Westphalia, which saw a counter-offer from three of Vienna's top-ranking nobles. Beethoven accepted the Viennese offer, and two months later found himself in a city with Napoleon's army at its gate and his noble sponsors nowhere in sight.

The Austrians made an attempt to resist the French invasion, but a day of bombardment led to their capitulation. Poor Beethoven took shelter in his brother Casper Carl's home, sheiding his ears with pillows in order to preserve whatever precious little remained of his diminished hearing. He did, however, produce three major works during this period, all in the key of E-flat major.

His *Fifth Piano Concerto*, the "Emperor," which was already nearly completed before Napoleon's assault and occupation, was dedicated to the Archduke Rudolph, one of the noble trio of financial guarantors. Beethoven also honoured the Archduke with the "*Les Adieux*" or "*Lebewohl*" *Piano Sonata*, its movements depicting sorrow at Rudolph's departure and absence, and joy at his

return. The third work was this String Quartet, which he dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz, another of the three nobles. It has a slow, calm introduction, and a significant portion of the first movement and its coda are marked by pizzicato passages that have earned the work its nickname, "*Harp*".

The work is rich to the point of being lavish and even sensuous, with each movement telescoping into the next with a harmony of intention and expression. While the "harp" has been described as Beethoven's most perfect string quartet, it is also one that is almost devilish to play.

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