

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Peter Gregson: Quartets One – Four

**Saturday 4 November 2023, 8.30pm**  
**Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall**

Classical music is an incredible, centuries-long story. As we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – share that story with the world today, we're creating as many ways for as many different people as possible to experience this wonderful art form.

Whether this is your first encounter with classical music or one of many, I'm absolutely thrilled that you're joining us for more powerful human experiences. Welcome to Classical Music: Autumn/Winter 2023/24.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

### Repertoire

#### Peter Gregson

##### From **Quartets: One**

1. Primary Colours
2. The Day Before
3. Sequence (Three)

12'

##### From **Quartets: Two**

1. Sequence (Four)
2. Warmth
3. Plainchant

13'

##### From **Quartets: Three**

1. Even
2. Up
3. Sequence (Eight)
4. Cantus
6. ...from a memory

23'

##### **Quartets: Four**

1. Three Parallels: 1
2. Three Parallels: 2
3. Three Parallels: 3

15'

### Performers

Carducci String Quartet

Peter Gregson *live electronics*

*This performance lasts approximately 1 hour.  
There is no interval.*

### Peter Gregson (b. 1987)

#### **Quartets: One; Two; Three; Four**

Seen in late afternoon sun, the sea becomes an expanse of silver flickers. High wind through a meadow has the grass swirling. With no action of mind or muscle, something fixed can be full of movement, something unchanging full of change.

So it is with these quartets, that stasis and motion coexist, and that the music seems to be in this state of its own accord, that it just is, has not been willed into being. Though made of sound – sound that may be rapturous, thrilling, mysterious, surprising – the music in its apparent independence of human agency, its freedom to be, has at its heart a great silence.

Yet everything we hear was indeed composed, made to be like this – composed by Peter Gregson, who released the first two of these quartets as EPs in 2016 and 2017, with the promise of two more to come. He fulfilled that promise a year ago, completing what he had always planned as a quartet of quartets, bound not by identifiable musical connections and relationships so much as by their being four ways of saying – or not saying – the same thing.

Speed and stillness are there from the start, in the slow breathing of tremors with which the first movement of *Quartets: One* begins. 'Primary Colours' is the movement's title, and perhaps this gentleness is one of those colours, together with the sway of melody with which the cello enters its zone of contemplation. Primary colours are not mixed. They stand apart from one another. But they are in the same place. Characteristically, the movement does not build towards a finish, which would be to contravene the music's sense of being unmotivated. It just stops.

The work as a whole, of course, goes on, along a path often taken by quartets of the past, through a slow movement – a lament, or perhaps a lament for how the conditions for expressing lament no longer obtain – and a dance, this one for jiggling cello, encouraging the others from beneath. This latter movement's title, 'Sequence (Three)', refers to the number of beats in each repetition within the cello part. There will be later sequences repeating four beats and eight.

*Quartets: Two* bubbles in as a circling streamer of electronic sound that summons the players to take their places. This is 'Sequence (Four)'. The two movements that follow are slow with electronic sound, if only in the background, supportive. 'Warmth' gradually stretches up from deep harmony. 'Plainchant', intertwining phrases that do not imitate ecclesiastical chant but may evoke its spirit, folds in gentle whiplash effects from the electronics – from elsewhere. The puzzle is left as it is, unexplained. Calm.

Within the frame of the whole, it is as if the electronic intrusion has been vanquished. The strings open *Quartets: Three* as if coming out into pure air after the smoke has cleared. 'Even' is this initial movement's title: it could be level or evening. Even song. Evensong. A hymn.

The short next movement, 'Up', introduces a new sound, that of strings being plucked, in overlapping patterns repeating or not repeating, hushed. Picking up their bows again, the musicians go on to 'Sequence (Eight)', which has something of the shape of the venerable passacaglia: a theme repeats – normally in the bass, though Gregson's is at the top of the texture – while other lines observe it but go their own ways.

In the fourth movement, 'Cantus', there are just four elements in the repeating line that continues all through. The electronics come and duly go, with a metallic array of crunches, bell sounds and washes. The final movement '...from a memory' takes the music disappearing into the blue...

...to reappear as the first trace of *Quartets: Four*. We know where we are now, and we are here. All the components have been slowly brought together. Electronics, though, have been left behind. All that remains is for the strings to proceed, alone and selfless, through three final slow movements, three aspects of serenity, 'Three Parallels'.

## Queen Elizabeth Hall Foyer, 10pm: Patina 360

And yet this is not the end. We cannot leave this realm all at once. There has to be a way station, a point from which we can go, and this is *Patina*. Bringing the 2021 album to life, Gregson and the quartet breathe out sounds to intermingle with those of the electronic environment. (Your ticket to the double bill *Peter Gregson: Quartets One – Four & Patina 360* will give you access to both events. *Patina 360* lasts approximately 50 minutes. There is no interval.)

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2023

### Find out more

- ▶ Carducci String Quartet
- ▶ Peter Gregson
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](https://southbankcentre.co.uk)

## You might also like...

### Patricia Kopatchinskaja & Friends: Pierrot Lunaire

Saturday 2 December 2023, 4pm & Sunday 3 December 2023, 5.30pm  
Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

The multi-talented violinist turns vocalist in the role of the moonstruck clown at the heart of Schoenberg's expressionist masterpiece.

### Paraorchestra: Drone Refractions

Friday 26 January 2024, 7pm & 9pm | The Clore Ballroom, Level 2, Royal Festival Hall

Charles Hazlewood and Paraorchestra turn the orchestra inside out, charting an immersive drone odyssey via some of minimalism's forebears and greatest composers.