

Howard
Assembly
Room



William Barton and Brodsky Quartet

Wed 15 Apr 2026
7.45pm

Programme

William Barton
(b. 1981)

Brief soundscape

Henry Purcell
(1659-95)

Fantasia in D minor

Peter Sculthorpe
(1929-2014)

Jabiru Dreaming

Robert Davidson
(b. 1965)

Minjerribah

Leoš Janáček
(1854-1928)

String Quartet No. 1: *The Kreutzer Sonata*
I Adagio – Con moto
II Con moto
III Con moto – Vivo – Andante
IV Con moto – (Adagio) – Più mosso

INTERVAL

Igor Stravinsky
(1882-1971)

Three Pieces for String Quartet
I 'Dance'

Andrew Ford
(b. 1957)

String Quartet No. 7: *Eden Ablaze*

Salina Fisher
(b. 1993)

String Quartet: *Tōrino*

Trad. Irish

She Moved Through the Fair

William Barton

Square Circles Beneath the Red Desert Sand

Artists

William Barton Yidaki

Brotsky Quartet

Krycia Osostowicz Violin

Ian Belton Violin

Paul Cassidy Viola

Jacqueline Thomas Cello

Presented in partnership with Cambridge Creative Management

A piece of wood

Jacqueline Thomas

How many different ways has humankind produced sounds with a hollowed-out piece of wood?... from drumming to blowing to plucking and scraping, the variations through the ages and across continents are endless. Thousands of years ago, the Aboriginal yidaki, possibly the world's oldest musical instrument, was created from eucalyptus trunks hollowed out by termites; not long afterwards ancient lyres emerged in the Middle East and later, viols in Europe paved the way for today's violins, violas and cellos; around the same time, whilst crumhorns developed into oboes and flutes, the wind instrument of the Māoris, the pūtōrino, was shaped and carved to mimic the cocoon of a case-moth. And the source of all these instruments is the noble tree, the life-breath of the planet, a species endlessly tenacious through millions of years of challenges to its very existence.

Tonight these elements converge, along with the human voice, to bring a rich and varied sound world through a sonic dialogue spanning millennia, an extraordinary arc through time and culture, where First Nations wisdom converses with the rich tradition of European chamber music and composers of today.

We begin with an improvised introduction on the yidaki, giving way to the pure sounds of the young Henry Purcell's Fantasia in D minor, a meandering exploration of falling 4th and rising 5ths.

William Barton's improvisation takes us seamlessly into Peter Sculthorpe's *Jabiru Dreaming*, a tribute to his beloved Kakadu and featuring the sounds of tribal music, the gait of the Jabiru stork and insects of the Interior. In both yidaki and strings, the boundaries are pushed open to create wind, string and percussive sounds, embracing the inspiration behind this powerful music.

Robert Davidson's evocation of the island *Minjerribah* (or North Stradbroke) pulsates with the heat and rhythms of sea and land, a joyous celebration of life; originally written for strings, this is a specially adapted version by the composer for these forces.

Janáček's String Quartet No. 1, titled *The Kreutzer Sonata* after the Tolstoy short story of the same name, is a four movement work exploring the tragic and murderous tale of a husband's jealousy. It is a fine example of Janáček's unique musical language; fast, often indecipherable patterns mimicking verbal utterances and speech patterns, as well as folk-influenced themes and dramatic outpourings of emotion.

A piece of wood (continued)

After the interval, a peasant dance from Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for String Quartet*, like a carnival of players each absorbed in their own part in the parade, leads us into Andrew Ford's *Eden Ablaze*. This one-movement work is a lament to the 'Black Summer' of 2019, when the subtropical rain forest of Gondwana was largely destroyed. Unlike regular regenerative bushfires, this forest never usually burns; the notes depict this loss of innocence for the environment and its emotional impact. First a ghostly evocation of the aria 'Ombra mai fu' from Handel's *Serse* (Xerxes) praises the shade of trees whilst burning embers crackle, then comes the raging inferno, exploding and jumping, eventually dying down whilst ashes float in the air.

Next we hear the calling sounds of the pūtōrino, as reimagined by New Zealand composer Salina Fisher in her one-movement String Quartet *Tōrino*. The instrument has three distinct voices; the trumpet (male voice), the flute (female), and a 'middle' voice with an eerie quality, inspired by the case-moth of its origins. Quarter-tones and variations of pitch are used to dramatic effect, echoing the haunting timbres of the instrument.

The calming sounds of ancient folkloric Ireland emerge with the traditional song 'She Moved Through the Fair', transcribed and sung by Paul Cassidy, and the improvised vocals of William Barton take us through to the final work on the programme, his own *Square Circles Beneath the Red Desert Sand*. The piece is deeply connected to the spirits of his country, Mount Isa and Kalkadunga, and plays with the juxtaposition of the different elements – organic, created and spiritual – in this vast arid landscape.

Artists' biographies

William Barton is widely recognised as Australia's leading didgeridoo player as well as a highly esteemed composer, instrumentalist and vocalist. He has composed works for didgeridoo and orchestras, string quartets, jazz and rock bands as well as collaborative contributions with some of Australia's leading composers. He started learning the instrument from his uncle, Arthur Peterson, an elder of the Wannyi, Lardil and Kalkadunga people. His mother, Delmae Barton, a singer, songwriter and poet who learnt to sing as a small child from listening to the bird calls, also encouraged his love of music leading William to work from an early age with traditional dance groups and fusion/rock jazz bands, orchestras, string quartets, and mixed ensembles. His passion is to create a journey for people through music and present them with a diversity of musical styles using the didgeridoo. He utilises his cultural heritage to present his didgeridoo fusion as a storyteller, engaging audiences in the uniqueness of Australia, its Aboriginal heritage and to challenge perspectives of the didgeridoo as an instrument. He works closely with classical music performers and composers to develop and sustain music for the didgeridoo in this environment. Throughout his diverse career William has forged a path in the classical musical world, with major commissions including for members of the Berlin Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony, Queensland Symphony as well as for contemporary dance companies and dancers such as Leigh Warren and Dancers, who premiered *Breathe* at both Womadelaide and at the 2012 Edinburgh International Festival. In 2008 the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony committee commissioned him as one of three composers for the Australian segment of the ceremony. A renowned performer, William has performed at historic events including Commonwealth Day 2019 at Westminster Abbey, at Anzac Cove in Gallipoli, the Bob Hawke State Memorial and International Jazz Day with Herbie Hancock and James Morrison. He has a strong desire to give back to his culture, people and community. One of his greatest enjoyments is his involvement in workshops with schools and children all over Australia, where he teaches the next generation didgeridoo and storytelling. With his prodigious musicality and building on his Kalkadunga heritage, William has vastly expanded the horizons of the didgeridoo and modern Australian music, resulting in numerous awards for his work, as well as receiving the Richard Gill Award for Distinguished Services to Australian Music and the Queensland Australian of the Year Award in 2023.



Artists' biographies (continued)

Since forming in 1972, the **Brodsky Quartet** have performed over 3,500 concerts on the major stages of the world and have released more than 70 recordings. A natural curiosity and an insatiable desire to explore has propelled the group in a number of artistic directions and continues to ensure them a prominent presence on the international chamber music scene and a rich and varied musical existence. Their energy and craftsmanship have attracted numerous awards and accolades worldwide, while their ongoing educational work provides a vehicle to pass on experience and stay in touch with the next generation. Having recently celebrated their 50th anniversary, the Quartet continue to enjoy a busy international performing schedule, extensively touring the major festivals and venues throughout Australasia, North and South America, Asia, South Africa and Europe, as well as in the UK, where the Quartet is based. Over the years, the Brodsky Quartet have undertaken numerous performances of the complete cycles of quartets by Schubert, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Britten, Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, Webern and Bartók. It is, however, the complete Shostakovich string quartets that have now become synonymous with their name: their 2012 London performance of the complete cycle resulted in their taking the prestigious title Artistic Associate at London's Kings Place. The Quartet have had a busy recording career and currently enjoy an exclusive relationship with Chandos Records. Releases on the label include a live recording of the complete Shostakovich cycle as well as quartets and quintets by Brahms, Elgar, Janáček and Debussy. Their set of Beethoven's late quartets was released in 2020 to critical acclaim and their 2021 release, *Homage to Bach*, comprises premiere recordings of Bach's three Solo Violin Sonatas arranged by Paul Cassidy. The Quartet marked their 50th anniversary with three diverse releases: the Schubert Quintet with cellist Laura van der Heijden, *Rocking Horse Road* with long-term collaborator Jacqui Dankworth and *Golden Oldies*, a compendium of encores arranged by the Quartet in celebration of this milestone. The Quartet took their name from the great Russian violinist Adolf Brodsky, the dedicatee of Tchaikovsky's violin concerto and a passionate chamber musician. Krysia Osostowicz plays a violin made by Francesco Gofriller, 1720; Ian Belton's violin is by Giovanni Paolo Maggini, c.1615. Paul Cassidy plays on a viola by Stefan-Peter Greiner, 2022 and Jacqueline Thomas's cello is by Thomas Perry of Dublin, 1785.



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Photographs of the Brodsky Quartet by **Sarah Cresswell**

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