

## **Villiers Quartet**

Katie Stillman, violin I

Tamaki Higashi, violin II

Carmen Flores, viola

Leo Melvin, cello

Named after Villiers Street in London, the Villiers Quartet encompasses the grand and iconic spirit of the extraordinary music tradition in Britain and has been praised for "exquisite ensemble playing" (*Seen & Heard International*), and their absolute "commitment and virtuosity" (*The Sunday Times*). The Villiers Quartet is the Quartet-in-Residence at the Jacqueline Du Pré Music Building at Oxford University.

Hailed as "Champions of British Music" (*The Observer*), the Villiers Quartet has become one of the most recognised quartets in the UK for the performance of British music. The VQ has released acclaimed recordings of works by Elgar, Delius, Peter Racine Fricker, William Sterndale Bennett, David Matthews, and most recently music by William Alwyn and Kuljit Bhamra, MBE. In 2020 they gave the world premiere of the complete 1888 Delius string quartet, featuring movements in their original versions uncovered by Professor Daniel Grimley from Oxford University

In 2020 the Villiers Quartet initiated new digitally-based projects including *VQ Discovery: Beethoven Discovery*, an online course to study Beethoven's quartets in-depth whilst in lockdown; *VQ Create*, mentoring secondary school pupils online to compose new music for string quartet; and *From Home: VQ Commissions*, commissioning new works from 6 diverse British composers to celebrate the VQ's 10th Anniversary season for 2021.

The Villiers Quartet has been broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 from the Leamington International Quartet Series, and on NPO Radio 4 live from the Concertgebouw. The VQ has been featured on BBC's *In Tune* and also BBC One's *The Andrew Marr Show* with pianist Alexis Ffrench and double bassist Leon Bosch. The VQ was the featured quartet on the score to the BBC film *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

The Villiers Quartet has presented masterclasses in the UK and abroad at Oxford University, Duke University, Dartmouth College, University of Nottingham, Syracuse University, Cal State LA, Jacksonville University, and Indiana University South Bend. ambassadors for British chamber music, the VQ has given premieres and performances of music by British composers including Anthony Payne, Alexander Goehr, Martyn Harry, David Matthews, and Elizabeth Kelly

The broad curiosity of the Villiers Quartet and its passion for teaching and performing have made the VQ a valuable resource for students and audiences alike. Inspiration comes from the heart of the Villiers Quartet's philosophy: **to believe in the art of string quartet.**

[www.villiersquartet.com](http://www.villiersquartet.com)

## **Katie Stillman**

Canadian violinist Katie Stillman has an extensive career as a soloist, chamber musician and orchestral principal. Last season, she directed and performed as a soloist with Manchester Camerata and London Concertante as well as guest leading Opera North's production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

With her duo partner Simon Lane, she has won many prizes including the Tillet Trust Young Artist Platform and Park Lane Group Young Artists' New Year Series, and performed in such venues as the Wigmore Hall, the Purcell Room, Bridgewater Hall and St. John's Smith Square. In 2011, 2014 and 2018 they recorded part of the ABRSM violin syllabus for the supporting exam material which is distributed worldwide.

Katie was a founding member of the Barbirolli Quartet which performed extensively throughout Europe including at festivals in Aix-en-Provence, Verbier and Aldeburgh. She is Associate Leader of Manchester Camerata and a member of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. Katie teaches violin and chamber music at Chetham's School of Music, pedagogy at the Royal Northern College of Music and plays regularly in concerts for children in the acclaimed series *Bach to Baby*.

## **Tamaki Higashi**

Japanese violinist Tamaki Higashi is a passionate chamber musician and the founding member of the Villiers Quartet, the resident quartet at the University of Oxford. With the Villiers Quartet, she performs regularly in the UK, Europe and USA, and have released numbers of discs of British music from major labels.

Tamaki's chamber music career started with the Degas Quartet in the USA, and she performed and toured across the nation. With the Degas Quartet, Tamaki has appeared at Aspen Music Festival, Great Lakes Chamber Festival as a guest artist. The Degas Quartet served as a resident quartet with Western Piedmont Symphony in Hickory, NC and worked closely to bring the music into the community. She had studied string quartet with members of Juilliard, Cleveland, Takacs, Fine Arts, Colorado Quartets.

Tamaki genuinely enjoys all the aspect of collaboration. She has worked with many distinguished musicians such as Jazz bassist Christian McBride, Indian Tabla specialist Kuljit Bhamra, amongst many other finest musicians within the chamber music scene. Tamaki studied violin with Lewis Kaplan and Muneko Otani, and viola with Jerry Horner, and has graduated from Mannes College of Music in New York.

## **Carmen Flores**

Carmen Flores is dedicated to creating new pathways for experiencing and performing classical music. From 2007 – 2019 Carmen was *Principal Viola* of the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, performing with the orchestra across the UK and abroad for the Birmingham Royal Ballet. Carmen has performed as soloist and Guest Principal Viola with orchestras and ensembles including English National Opera, the Canadian Opera Company, Orchestra of the Swan, the English Chamber Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Sinfonia VIVA, and the European Union Chamber Orchestra.

She is a founding member of the acclaimed Villiers Quartet (VQ), which is Quartet-in-Residence at the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building at Oxford University. Hailed as one of the most “adventurous” string quartets in the UK (*Strad Magazine*) and “Champions of British Music” (*Guardian*), the VQ has made several acclaimed recordings on the Naxos, Somm, and Lyrita record labels. She is a recipient of the prestigious US Fulbright Award, and she has given performance masterclasses at the University of Nottingham, Oxford University, Dartmouth College, Birmingham Conservatoire, and Sheffield University, among others.

Carmen’s international career has seen her perform throughout the United States, Canada, Asia, and Europe and she has been featured on several BBC Radio and Television broadcasts, including BBC Radio 3’s *In Tune* and *The Andrew Marr Show*. She has participated in Les Jardins Musicaux Festival (Switzerland), Tanglewood (USA), Pacific Music Festival (Japan), and the Boyne Music Festival (Ireland).

She is Director of the Nottingham Chamber Music Festival (NCMF), which celebrates chamber music and the creative community at venues across Nottingham. She has also served as advisor on programming to Nottingham Trent University’s University Hall and has worked closely with concert venues and organisations to curate music programmes. She performs on a viola made in 2006 by British luthier William Castle.

## **Leo Melvin**

London-born cellist Leo Melvin graduated with honours from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he studied on full scholarship, with Richard Lester. Leo also studied in Hamburg, Germany with professors Kleif Carnarius, Claudio Bohorquez and Troels Svane. He has performed with the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Philharmonia Orchestra, given solo and chamber recitals across the UK, and he also teaches cello and piano in London.

Leo has performed several Concerti (including Dvorak, Schumann, Haydn D and Brahms Double) with various orchestras such as Sinfonia D'Amici and Kings Sinfonietta and recorded a solo cello track for Howard Goodall's CD release 'Enchanted Voices.' In October 2013, Leo was invited to play with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe on their Academy Program and has performed with the orchestra in Dijon.