

Quintet for strings (2019) - 15 minutes EP 73524
vln. vln. va. vc. vc.

Programme Note:

When I was commissioned by the British Music Society of York to mark their 100th anniversary, I was asked to compose a celebratory work. My quintet embodies both celebration and reflection: the festive energy of celebration, and reflection appropriate to the traditions of European chamber music that the society honours.

My quintet is in one movement lasting about a quarter of an hour. It opens with a quiet conversation between the two celli; despite interruptions and decorations, their duo continues until a fast loud tutti establishes a much more extrovert mood. With its unison pizzicati and repetitive compound time rhythm, this music acts as a rondo theme which will make a number of returns throughout the piece, as well as seeding some even faster music.

These complementary ideas – reflective and celebratory– are woven together throughout. All the players have the chance to be in the foreground, not just the celli; and these more intimate moments can lead to tutti sections that are slower and quieter – the tutti is not only reserved for the bright rondo material. The rondo is characterised by clear, essentially diatonic harmony, whereas the slower and quieter music, solo or tutti, is often shaded by microtones.

Underlying the frequent juxtaposition of contrasting tempi is a basic ‘fast/slow/fast’ in which the central chorale-textured music is heralded by a bell-like passage that returns to form the final coda.

The quintet was commissioned by The British Music Society of York and was written for the Sacconi string quartet, with Tim Lowe cello, to première in York on 2nd October, 2020. They will also play one of my favourite works, Schubert’s C major quintet, to which the celli in my quintet play discreet homage.
Due to the pandemic, the premiere is postponed to 2021.

NL 2020.