



Sacconi Quartet **Biography**
String Quartet

“An exceptional ensemble...a unanimous sense of musical breath and a meticulous attention to detail.” Musical Opinion

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Ben Hancox *violin*
Hannah Dawson *violin*
Robin Ashwell *viola*
Cara Berridge *cello*

The award-winning Sacconi Quartet is recognised for its unanimous and compelling ensemble, consistently communicating with a fresh and imaginative approach. Performing with style and commitment, the Quartet is known throughout the world for its creativity and integrity of interpretation. Formed in 2001, its four founder members continue to demonstrate a shared passion for string quartet repertoire, infectiously reaching out to audiences with their energy and enthusiasm. The Quartet have enjoyed a highly successful international career, performing regularly throughout Europe, at London’s major venues, in recordings and on radio broadcasts. The Sacconi is Quartet in Association at the Royal College of Music and Associate Artist at the Bristol Old Vic.

The 2015/16 season saw the Quartet focusing on the works of Jonathan Dove, Graham Fitkin and John McCabe, culminating in CD recordings of all three composers. Their commission with Mark Padmore of Jonathan Dove’s new song cycle *In Damascus*, with words by Syrian poet Ali Safar, was premiered in Folkestone, Aldeburgh and London. Other highlights of last season included return performances at William Walton’s house in Ischia, Italy, and collaborations with Freddy Kempf, Charles Owen, Roger Chase, Pierre Doumenge, Miloš Karadaglić, Tim Boulton, Simon Rowland-Jones, Garfield Jackson and David Waterman. They also recorded John McCabe’s *Horn Quintet*, written for them and David Pyatt in 2011.

In Summer 2015 the quartet launched HEARTFELT, their most innovative project to date. A radical re-interpretation of Beethoven’s iconic String Quartet in A minor opus 132, HEARTFELT pushed the boundaries of chamber music through combining sound, light and touch, for a truly unique performance in which audience members connected with each performer’s heartbeat through holding robotic ‘hearts’. Developed in a unique collaboration with robotics designers Rusty Squid and lighting designer Ziggy Jacobs-Wyburn, and funded by Arts Council England, HEARTFELT received 4-star reviews from *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, and was described by the latter as “a powerful way to experience the visceral physicality of Beethoven’s profound thanksgiving”. www.heartfelt.org.uk

Now in its tenth year, the Sacconi Chamber Music Festival in Folkestone, Kent is an established event in the cultural calendar and is expanding year on year with challenging programming and exciting collaborations. 2016’s festival featured Jonathan Dove as resident composer and included a rare performance of Steve Reich’s *Triple Quartet* with twelve players.

Firm believers in the importance of bringing chamber music to the next generation, the Sacconi Quartet dedicates much passion, time and energy to education work. They regularly lead workshops and give school and family concerts as part of the Sacconi Chamber Music Festival outreach programme and the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust. Their latest project, an educational show entitled *The String Thing*, with script by Matthew Sharp, went down a storm wherever it was performed.

The Quartet's recording of Beethoven Op. 132 and Mendelssohn Op. 13, the first commercial pairing of these closely related works, was recently released on Sacconi Records, and received a 5-star review in Classical Music. The previous release, a disc of Czech quartets, was received with widespread critical acclaim and is regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM. The Quartet's debut recording of Haydn's opus 54 quartets was praised in the press and both their Ravel and Haydn CDs were featured in The Full Works programme on Classic FM. They have also recorded for Signum, NMC and Champs Hill Records, and their 2006 Naxos recording of Finzi's song cycle *By Footpath and Stile* with baritone Roderick Williams was well received in all the national broadsheets and BBC Music Magazine.

To date, the Quartet has given twenty-two world premières and four British premières, including works by György Kurtág, Paul Patterson, John McCabe, Simon Rowland-Jones, Robin Holloway, John Metcalf and Alun Hoddinott, and they performed as the solo string quartet on Paul McCartney's hit song *Come Home*. The Sacconi Quartet has been joined on stage by many artists including Pekka Kuusisto, Melvyn Tan, Andrew Marriner, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Guy Johnston, Alasdair Beatson, Tom Poster, Matthew Rose, Bellowhead's Jon Boden and actor Timothy West. The Sacconi Quartet has performed at all the major London venues and has travelled extensively throughout the rest of the UK and Europe. The Quartet toured to the Middle East in 2009, where they were invited by the British Council to give concerts and workshops in Jordan's capital city, Amman.

The name Sacconi Quartet comes from the outstanding twentieth-century Italian luthier and restorer Simone Sacconi, whose book *The Secrets of Stradivari* is considered an indispensable reference for violin makers. Ben Hancox plays a 1932 Sacconi violin and Robin Ashwell a 1934 Sacconi viola, both made in New York. Hannah Dawson plays a 1927 Sacconi violin made in Rome, and Cara Berridge plays a Nicolaus Gagliano cello from 1781. Ben, Hannah & Cara have all been generously loaned these instruments by the Royal Society of Musicians, a charity which helps musicians in need, for which they are extremely grateful. Robin is indebted to Ellen Solomon for the use of his viola.

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