

cell • quartet assai

Founded in 2013, the **ASSAI cello quartet** was born out of an initiative from four symphoniaASSAI musicians to explore and expand their collaboration beyond the symphonic frame. Since then the quartet has been performing regularly in Belgium and other European countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands. Each concert represents a unique experience, bringing together the four members' profound commitment and unceasing motivation for sharing the wonders of chamber music through the distinctive sound of four cellos.

Koen Berger, Helena Fuertes, Johanna Peiler and Shuya Tanaka found each other through cello playing and together they combine the character and qualities of four different nationalities: Belgian, Spanish, German, and Japanese. Passionate about music in general and the cello in particular, the members of the **ASSAI cello quartet** want to share their enthusiasm and energy not only through orchestral playing, but also through this very particular chamber ensemble. The quartet's motivation to interact with all audiences enhances their approach to performing, teaching and mentoring. The four members are active as music educators and they enjoy working with young cellists as a quartet, projecting the empathy and connectivity of chamber music as an example of communication that we should strive for.

With the particular versatility of a formation with four equal instruments, the **ASSAI cello quartet** focuses on pieces originally written for the ensemble (like the beautiful *Légende et Danses* by J. Jongen or the *Concert-Walzer* by W. Fitzenhagen) alongside new transcriptions and contemporary works: a vibrant combination of the familiar and the daring. In keeping its mission of supporting the creation of invigorating new repertoire while using thematic and innovative programming, the quartet often collaborates with living composers and arrangers from Belgium and abroad. Among the transcriptions written for the quartet are Biem van Hoften's wonderful versions of *La Valse* by M. Ravel and *The old castle and Baba Yaga* from the *Pictures at an exhibition* by M. Mussorgsky. A strong advocate for contemporary music, the quartet has premiered a number of new compositions in the last years, such as *Scherzo* by A. Charlton (2017), *Switch* by J. Sporck (2019) and *Telesthesia* by R. Cameron-Wolfe (2019).





Koen Berger (°1984) joined early in his life the orchestra of his hometown, the Hasselts Symfonie Orkest. With this orchestra he participated in numerous music courses and concerts, including concert tours abroad to France, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy and the Czech Republic.

Koen studied with Jaap Kruithof at the Lemmensinstituut in Leuven, where he obtained his Master's degree in cello performance. In addition he obtained a first prize in solfège, a teaching certificate and a second Master's degree, option chamber music with Roel Dieltiens and Marc Tooten.

Currently Koen teaches the cello at Academie de Vonk in Oud-Heverlee and the International School of Brussels and also teaches 'arts' at the Sint-Albertuscollege in Haasrode. Furthermore he's active as principal cellist in the Frascati Chamber Orchestra and Frascati Symphonic with which he undertook some concert tours to China. Besides symphoniaASSAI and the ASSAI cello quartet, Koen regularly performs with orchestra's such as La Passione, Ataneres Ensemble and Brussels Philharmonic. As a freelance musician he also works and records with a lot of occasional ensembles in Belgium and abroad and supervises workshops for Eventmasters and Deloitte University.

Originally from Spain, **Helena Fuertes Plata** (°1984) studied music in the conservatories of Astorga, Oviedo and Groningen (the Netherlands) with teachers Inmaculada Requejo, Vladimir Atapin, Antonio Peña and Jan Ype Nota. In 2012 she concluded her Master's degree at the Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel under the professor Viviane Spanoghe. Other important influences during her music education include renowned cellists such as Maria Kliegel, Amit Peled, David Apellániz, Adolfo Gutiérrez Arenas, Paul Friedhoff or Francois Guye.



Passionate about chamber music and orchestra playing, she has performed with various orchestras and ensembles throughout Europe, such as Orquesta Presjovem, Sabugo Filarmonía, Sebastien Strings, Orquesta Ciudad de León, Orquesta Sinfónica de Gijón or the Orquesta Fundación Príncipe de Asturias.

Helena combines her performance activity with her pedagogical work as music educator in the European School of Brussels IV in Laeken. Helena is member of the orchestra symphoniaASSAI since its creation in 2009 and founding member of the ASSAI cello quartet.



Johanna Peiler (°1987) was born in Germany and grew up in Brussels. In 2012 she obtained her Master's degree with great distinction from the Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel, having studied under Jeroen Reuling and with Maria Kliegel at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz in Cologne. She participated in various master classes all over Europe with renowned teachers such as Gary Hoffmann or François Guye.

Johanna has played in many orchestras such as the National Orchestra of Belgium, the Ensemble Orchestral de Bruxelles or the Zomeropera Orkest Alden Biesen. She has performed as principal cellist in the Dutch Youth Orchestra NJO, in the

German MAKSi Akademieorchester with whom she also played as a soloist, as well as in the orchestra symphoniaASSAI of which she is a founding member.

Recordings of her concerts and interviews have been broadcast on radio stations such as the Belgian Classical radio station musiq3. Since 2012 Johanna Peiler also teaches cello at the Jugendmusikschule Heinsberg in Germany.

Shuya Tanaka (°1994) was born in Fukuoka, Japan. He started studying cello with Katsumi Sadakuni in Sadakuni Music Academy when he was 8 years old. Following Katsumi's advice he moved to Leuven in Belgium when he was 14 years old. There he continued his studies with Jan Sciffer in KSO Lemmensinstituut where he graduated with summa cum laude after 4 years.

Shuya completed his Master's degree in cello performance at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp under professor Justus Grimm, where he graduated in 2019 with summa cum laude. During his studies he won several prizes such as Belfius Classics in 2012 and Triomphe de l'Art in 2018.

His activities include solo performances, chamber music, orchestral playing and composing, focusing mainly on cello, piano, strings and BGM samples.



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