

“...the first time and the last” for cello quartet

The story of the composition of this piece is rather unusual. I began by copying out a four-part vocal motet by the 16th-century Flemish composer Roland de Lassus. As a young music student in my teenage years, I had been exposed to the dozens of serene and beautiful Lassus motets because I was given them to play on the piano as score-reading exercises. But while getting better at reading clefs and negotiating voice-crossings, I also came to appreciate these as wonderful compositions: highly controlled and disciplined yet deeply expressive works. When a commission was offered to me for a cello quartet from 4inCorrespondence, a group made up of members of the National Symphony in Washington DC, I soon realized that the beautifully singing lines of the Lassus motets would make an ideal starting point for a new piece. So I chose one that seemed particularly distinctive and after copying it out, I began to transform it into my own music by both adding to and subtracting from Lassus' original. The resulting piece consists of three sections, in which the first and the second are substantial re-workings of and variations on this motet, while the third is a direct transcription of the original, followed by a brief coda.

The title of this piece comes from a line near the end of a short story called *The Kidney-shaped Stone that Moves Every Day* by Haruki Murakami: “...what matters is deciding in your heart to accept another person completely. When you do that, it is always the first time and the last.”

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