

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 25 May 2024  
7.30pm

## Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Elena Urioste violin  
Savitri Grier violin  
Juan-Miguel Hernandez viola  
Edgar Francis viola  
Laura van der Heijden cello  
Tony Rymer cello  
Graham Mitchell double bass

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) String Quintet in C Op. 29 (1801)  
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio molto espressivo •  
III. Scherzo. Allegro • IV. Presto*

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) Metamorphosen (1945) *arranged by Rudolf Leopold*

*Interval*

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) Verklärte Nacht Op. 4 (1899)

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*The programme has changed slightly since these programme notes were written.*

Dating from 1801, the year after the First Symphony and Op. 18 quartets, **Beethoven's** sole String Quintet is a strangely neglected masterpiece. Like Mozart in his quintets, Beethoven adds a second viola to the string quartet; and with the enriched texture goes an amplitude of scale and harmonic range. Opening with a noble violin theme, the first movement trades on the contrast between broad, lyrical melody and a skittering triplet theme. Tonally this is one of the most adventurous movements in early Beethoven. The *dolce* second theme, unfolding in graceful imitation, appears not in the expected (in 1801) G major but in the more distant key of A major – a luminous contrast to the home key of C major.

Few Beethoven movements display such sensuous delight in colour as the *Adagio molto espressivo*. With a nod to Mozart, the whole movement – opera by other means – is a luxurious outpouring of ornate, Italianate melody. When the main theme returns, it is gorgeously rescored, with the second violin playing pizzicato, like a serenading mandolin.

In the lolling *Scherzo* Beethoven makes comic capital out of the insistent arpeggio figure heard in the opening bar. The trio begins airily, then plunges into rowdy rusticity, complete with bagpipe drones and stomping offbeat accents. In Germany and Austria the finale is known as 'Der Sturm'. Shuddering tremolos and 'lightning flashes' explain why. The music slews round to the unexpected key of A flat for a bucolic contrasting theme. Then, out of the blue, Beethoven introduces a tongue-in-cheek parody of a courtly minuet whose key, A major, had played a crucial role in the first movement. The 'storm' returns, followed by a varied repeat of the minuet and a coda that, like the bucolic theme, veers to A flat major: a

final confirmation that the colour contrast between keys a third apart is a prime structural feature of this marvellously inventive work.

'It should not be forgotten that this work, at its first performance in Vienna, was hissed and caused riots and fist fights. But it soon became very successful', remarked **Schoenberg** wryly in his programme note to *Verklärte Nacht* ('Transfigured night'). Schoenberg had composed his tone poem for string sextet in 1899, while on holiday with Zemlinsky and his sister Mathilde, whom he later married. He may have even been prompted by Zemlinsky's Dehmel setting *Maiblumen blühten überall*. After the notorious 1902 première one critic wrote that the music sounded 'as if the score of Tristan had been smeared while the ink was still wet'. Yet for all its intense chromaticism, the harmonic language of *Verklärte Nacht* never goes beyond late Mahler, while its technique of continuous variation derives from Brahms.

It was not only Schoenberg's music that offended conservative-minded listeners. Richard Dehmel (1863-1920), whose verses we sampled in *Maiblumen blühten überall*, was notorious for his radical social and sexual thinking. Although his poem *Verklärte Nacht* might seem sentimental, even kitsch, today, it was daringly progressive for the 1890s. It tells of two lovers walking in a moonlit forest. The woman confesses to the man that she is expecting the child of a man she did not love, believing that motherhood would give her a purpose in life. The man comforts her, telling her that their mutual love will make the other man's child their own. Schoenberg marks this cathartic moment with a change from troubled D minor to glowing D major. In the shimmering coda each of the work's themes recurs, 'modified anew', as Schoenberg put it, 'so as to glorify the miracles of nature that have changed the night of tragedy into a transfigured night'.

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