

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 10 June 2024
7.30pm

This concert is supported by David and Clare Kershaw

Pavel Haas Quartet

Veronika Jarůšková violin
Marek Zwiebel violin
Šimon Truszka viola
Peter Jarůšek cello

Boris Giltburg piano

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Quartet No. 2 in A Op. 26 (1861)

*I. Allegro non troppo • II. Poco adagio •
III. Scherzo. Poco allegro - Trio • IV. Finale.
Allegro*

Interval

Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor Op. 25 (1861)

*I. Allegro • II. Intermezzo. Allegro ma non troppo
- Trio. Animato • III. Andante con moto •
IV. Rondo alla Zingarese. Presto*



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25



SUPPORT OUR AUDIENCE FUND: EVERY NOTE COUNTS

Ensure Wigmore Hall remains a vibrant hub of musical excellence by making a donation today.
wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate | 020 7258 8220



Join & Support
Donations

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



The **Brahms** we meet this evening is a young man at a crossroads. These quartets were completed in the autumn of 1861 when he was 28. Since turning 20 he had been 'discovered' by Robert and Clara Schumann, proclaimed a genius by them (not entirely beneficially), shared the tragedy of Robert's mental illness and suicide, then had to address his own passionate feelings for Clara. As he wrote these quartets, his own family was falling apart: his mother and father parted, then his mother died, all of which weakened his roots and ties to his native Hamburg. So, approaching 30, famous as a musician but a little adrift as a man, he sensed that advancement would not come to him in Hamburg; he had to go find it in – to him – the greatest musical city: Vienna. Soon after he arrived, a rehearsal of these two quartets was arranged with the violinist Joseph Hellmesberger, Viennese musical aristocracy and one of the most influential musicians in the city. No-one's opinion could be more important. At once, he proclaimed Brahms to be 'Beethoven's heir', and programmed both pieces in his concert series. That led to further interest and more successful concerts (all seemingly arranged at a few weeks' notice) and he was launched as both player and composer.

Despite this swift success, it took Brahms most of another decade to feel at home in Vienna ('...it does not always smell sweet', he wrote of its musical world), but its heritage had already held him in thrall well before he moved there. Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven haunt these pieces, but above all Schubert. Brahms had gradually discovered him during the 1850s – as indeed had the wider world. After his tragically early death, Schubert's music fell into unhelpful, neglectful hands and many key scores disappeared for decades. Brahms performed some, including the 'Trout' Quintet and *Die schöne Müllerin*, and he heard others, such as the Ninth Symphony. Come 1863 he would write: 'My love for Schubert is a very serious one, probably just because it is not a fleeting fancy... To me he is like a child of the gods, who plays with Jupiter's thunder... he plays in such a region, at a height to which the others are far short of raising themselves...'

It is impossible to overstate the impact of Schubert's influence on Brahms. Scrutinise these quartets in the minutest detail and you will find Schubertian techniques and tendencies everywhere. That discussion lies well beyond the scope of this note but is worth bearing in mind as the surface of the music – especially the sound world of Op. 26 – is also unmistakably reminiscent of Schubert, and owes its sense of space, poise and radiant warmth to him. Brahms learns from Schubert's capacity to create immense architecture without sacrificing momentum, as well as his often-obsessive fascination with repeated rhythms and motifs within a melody or section.

The two quartets were published at the same time, possibly because they make such a contrasting pair. Where Op. 26's 'Viennese' charm and warmth evokes Schubert, Op. 25 links us to several other important musical loves of Brahms. Its key is definitively important. Brahms used G minor almost nowhere else – only for shorter solo piano pieces – but perhaps he had another famous piano quartet by another favourite composer in mind – Mozart's K478 in G minor. Like Mozart, he found a turbulent, sometimes anxious and introverted quality in the key: just take that compelling piano solo which opens Op. 25 and contrast it with the opening of Op. 26. The tension and intensity it establishes holds sway over the first three movements but is then blown away in a finale inspired by another of Brahms's great musical loves: Hungarian dance music. He loved it in his early years in Hamburg; then, in the 1850s, he got to play it as the accompanist to Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi. Once in Vienna, he found no shortage of *czárdás* to enjoy at the Prater. This dance is ferociously energetic, virtuosic and spectacular. There is a reason why musicians often close a concert with this piece – it is very hard act to follow.

I introduced Brahms above as a young man facing uncertainty and change – and there is no question that he was plagued by second thoughts and insecurities no matter how often he was proclaimed 'A genius!' or 'Beethoven's heir.' Perhaps these two pieces were so immediately successful because they show him at his most certain and decisive. Contrast them with his Third Piano Quartet, which was conceived around the same time as Op. 26 but took a clear 14 years longer to be finalised. By then Brahms had returned to it several times, changing its key and structure, and doing away with or repurposing several movements – an exhausting process. Reputedly his self-criticism also led him to destroy at least 20 string quartets before writing one he felt able to publish. These two quartets are also notable because they are unlike anything else he was writing at the time: almost all his published output in the decades either side of them was vocal or solo/duo keyboard music, yet he exhibits a full mastery and command of the ensemble and genre.

Indeed, the quartets set the pattern for his entire chamber music output, some 25 pieces completed over the course of 40 years. In his survey of them, musicologist David Broderick observes that Brahms found inexhaustible inspiration in the four-movement structure and form you hear twice tonight: he inherited it from his Viennese masters and never felt the need to diverge from it.

© Svend McEwan-Brown 2024

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.