

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 11 June 2022 7.30pm

Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky violin

Sergei Bresler violin

Ori Kam viola

Kyril Zlotnikov cello

Supported by The Dorset Foundation - in memory of Harry M Weinrebe

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 5 in A Op. 18 No. 5 (1798-9)

I. Allegro • II. Menuetto • III. Andante cantabile • IV. Allegro

String Quartet No. 6 in B flat Op. 18 No. 6 (1800)

*I. Allegro con brio • II. Adagio ma non troppo • III. Scherzo. Allegro •
IV. La Malinconia. Adagio – • V. Allegretto quasi Allegro*

Interval

String Quartet No. 11 in F minor Op. 95 'Serioso' (1810-1)

*I. Allegro con brio • II. Allegretto ma non troppo •
III. Allegro assai vivace ma serioso – Più allegro •
IV. Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato*

String Quartet No. 16 in F Op. 135 (1826)

*I. Allegretto • II. Vivace • III. Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo •
IV. Grave, ma non troppo tratto – Allegro*



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

Thank you to the Friends of Wigmore Hall

The generosity of our Friends has been invaluable during the difficulties of the last two years and is proving instrumental as we rebuild our audiences, support our artists, and ensure a vibrant concert series for all to enjoy in the Hall and online.

To join our community of Friends and to take advantage of advance booking for our forthcoming 2022/23 Season, visit: wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends. Your support will truly make a difference.

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 convention of dividing **Beethoven's** music into periods has been argued over at length. Hearing the string quartets he composed in different decades reveals that, while there changes in approach, there are many concerns that remain. Throughout his career, from the graceful six quartets of Op. 18, through the drama of Op. 59, Op. 74 and Op. 95, to the experimentation of Opp. 127, 130, 131, 132 and 135, Beethoven worked at the limits of what were then the formal, harmonic, thematic and rhythmic conventions, constantly expanding the sound-world of the ensemble and being unafraid of combining elevated registers with dances and folk-like idioms.

Beethoven began composing what became Op. 18 No. 5 in A major having completed the first three of the set of six, but put it to one side while he worked on other pieces, finishing the score in 1799. It is modelled on Mozart's quartet in the same key, K464, indicating the young composer's determination to insert himself in the Classical tradition. Op. 18 No. 6 in B flat, composed in the spring or summer of 1800, on the other hand, is an early instance within Beethoven's quartets of extra-musical being important to their interpretation. The *Adagio* that begins the finale is entitled '*La Malinconia*' ('Melancholy') and marked to be played 'with the greatest delicacy' ('*Questo pezzo si deve trattare colla più gran delicatezza*'), creating a contrasting foil to the whirl of the *Allegretto quasi Allegro* into which it leads.

Quartet No. 11 in F minor Op. 95 was composed in October 1810. Unusually for Beethoven, it was not produced to commission and seems intended to have been primarily for the appreciation of connoisseurs; it was not performed in public until 1814, and was only published two years later. The dedicatee was Beethoven's old friend, Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovecz, a Hungarian civil servant who was also keen cellist and quartet composer. Beethoven had composed the humorous 'Eyeglass Duo' to play with Zmeskall back in 1796; over a decade later, he took part in soirees hosted by Zmeskall, which seemed to serve as chamber music laboratories. Freed from having to please a patron or the general public, Beethoven was able to experiment, creating in Op. 95 a string quartet of such intensity that it became known as the 'Serioso'.

Beethoven was studying Mozart's operas around the same time as he composed Op. 95 and, while the intensity with which he pursues the opening theme of the quartet seems to be inherently abstract, the use of silence and contrasting gestures have been heard by musicologist Nancy November as more theatrical in character. The second movement is in D major, far removed from the first movement's F minor. From the cello's initial descending steps to the yearning fugue begun by the viola, the music has a fragility from which it is rudely snatched by the *Allegro assai vivace ma serio*. As Beethoven's expressive marking indicates, this is a scherzo that takes its playfulness seriously. Beethoven's obsessive pursuit of the dotted-rhythm motif, thrown off-kilter by metrical displacement and fragmentation, contrasts with the otherworldly harmonies of the chorale-like theme of the trio. Instead of observing the Classical convention of repeating the opening scherzo verbatim, Beethoven interweaves it with material from the trio in the second half of the piece and truncates its recapitulation. The final movement, too,

seems to strain at its formal limits; it begins with a slow introduction, *Larghetto espressivo*, that merges into an *Allegretto agitato* that worries away at a two-note motif in F minor, from which it is only released by the joyous final F major allegro coda.

Beethoven pursued the experimentation he had enjoyed in Op. 95 still further with the five string quartets he composed in the 1820s, the first three (opp. 127, 132, 130) to a generously open commission from Prince Galitzin, the last two (opp. 131 and 135) dedicated to individuals who had more personal connections to the composer. Johann Wolfmeier (sometimes Wolfmayer) was a wealthy Viennese textile merchant who had secretly supported the composer for many years. In a conversation book from August 1826, violinist Karl Holz wrote to Beethoven, 'Wolfmayer is so happy, that he defended you 25 years ago and now people are realizing this'. Holz may have been behind the dedication of Op. 135 to Wolfmeier, as the score was only published in September 1827, six months after Beethoven's death.

With his final string quartet, Op. 135, Beethoven returned to a four-movement format. Yet, as with the other 'late' quartets, within that standard he broke down formal conventions. Critic Adolf Bernhard Marx likened the opening to a 'melancholy memory of a long gone, more beautiful time'. Throughout, the music seems to be asking questions, and questions have been asked about how to understand its sudden turns to new harmonic areas and themes. The 'buzzing' 'beer bass' heard in the second movement *Vivace*, as the first violin leaps over a thundering tutti from the other players of the quartet, has even prompted some commentators to describe it as 'non-music'. No such thing could be said of the *Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo*, whose melody stretches and curls into the heavens.

At the head of each of the parts for the last movement of Op. 135 there is a separate line of music, not to be played, with words written underneath. It is entitled '*Der schwer gefasste Entschluss*' ('The Difficult Resolution') and asks '*Muss es sein?* – must it be? '*Es muss sein!* – it must be! – is the answer. Often, the question being asked is assumed to be one of great profundity, of fate knocking once again on Beethoven's door. However, as is so often the case with Beethoven's biography, there are several competing narratives, some more scurrilous than others. Karl Holz, Beethoven's amanuensis and second violinist in Ignaz Schuppanzigh's quartet, explained that the question reflected an exchange between the composer and Ignaz Dembscher, a wealthy amateur who had asked to be granted permission to play Op. 130. As Dembscher had not attended the work's première, Beethoven insisted that he pay the 50 florins due for a subscription to the concert series. Biographer Anton Schindler, by contrast, thought the question-and-answer derived from an exchange between Beethoven and his housekeeper. Moritz Schlesinger, who published Op. 135, recalled that Beethoven's '*Muss es sein?*' pertained to the composer bewailing having to make a fair copy of the score himself. And then there is the mocking canon for four voices (WoO. 196) on the same theme, which suggests that it should not be taken too seriously at all.

© Laura Tunbridge 2022

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.