

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 11 May 2022 7.30pm

Danish String Quartet

Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen violin

Frederik Øland Olsen violin

Asbjørn Nørgaard viola

Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin cello

CLASSIC *fm*

Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



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

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

String Quartet in D minor D810 'Death and the Maiden' (1824)

I. Allegro • II. Andante con moto •

III. Scherzo. Allegro molto • IV. Presto

Interval

Lotta Wennäkoski (b.1970)

Pige (2021-2)

I. Vorüber, ach, vorüber! • II. Daktylus • III. Pigen og scrapbogen

Franz Schubert

Der Tod und das Mädchen D531 (1817) *arranged by Danish String Quartet*

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



It is impossible for us to be fully in tune with early 19th-century attitudes to mortality. Death was there to be dealt with at every turn – death in childbirth, in infancy, from what are now thought of as minor illnesses but were then untreatable. This omnipresence must have led to levels of both preoccupation and acceptance that we cannot properly imagine.

During his mid-20s, **Schubert** had begun to show signs of syphilis. There were fevers, periods of hospitalisation and confinement to his own bed. Demoralising and debilitating, these increasingly frequent episodes hampered his career. In 1824, the year he composed the 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet, he wrote to his friend the painter Leopold Kupelwieser:

Imagine a man who can never regain his health, whose consequent and utter despair makes matters worse instead of better; imagine, I say, a man whose shining hopes have come to nothing, to whom the prospect of love and friendship brings only anguish, who is losing all enjoyment of beauty... Each night I go to sleep hoping never to wake, yet every morning reopens the wounds of yesterday.

Later in the same letter, Schubert writes more optimistically, 'I want to write another quartet, in fact this is how I intend to pave the way towards a grand symphony.' He must have known that an early death was likely, but also that it was fruitless to regard its imminence as inevitable. At the same time the 'utter despair' of which he wrote was bound to break through; and there would be periods when death would seem more of a welcome release than a fearful prospect.

That dichotomy is at the heart of the Quartet in D minor, in its unforgettably eerie slow movement. For its material Schubert turned to a song he had written in 1817, a setting of a poem by Matthias Claudius in which the figure of Death woos a young girl. Death's music is played first, without being articulated by the singer. Artfully limited in range of both pitch and rhythm, it is seductively restful. The singer enters with the words of the maiden in more emotionally wrought music: she protests that she is too young to fall into his clutches. But Death replies, 'Give me your hand, you lovely, gentle creature. I am a friend, and not here to punish you. Take courage, I am not cruel; you shall sleep softly in my arms.' In the quartet, Schubert does not quote the maiden's music, only that of Death.

The quartet is therefore a statement of deeply personal tragedy. However, we should not take lightly Schubert's professed determination to pave the way to a grand symphony: this is also 'public' music, intended to make a striking impression on a large audience. He still had ambitions to revive those 'shining hopes' of being revered as a composer of instrumental and symphonic music, and not just as a source of songs for the parlours of Vienna.

The quartet's very opening grabs the listener by the throat – a tearing unison, then a bubbling up of energy, soon followed by a watchful and ominous quietness as if some demon is waiting to

pounce. The *Andante* second movement takes Death's starkly fascinating theme through a series of variations, of which the most fatally soothing is in the warm and comforting realm of G major. The *Scherzo* makes a bolder contrast between the present reality of pain, anger and anxiety and, in the trio section, a peace that is either out of reach or achievable only by paying the ultimate price.

The finale, a sonata-rondo, is based on the rhythm of the *tarantella*. This Italian dance is supposed to imitate the convulsive madness brought on by a tarantula bite, and there are surely parallels with Schubert's illness. In his version there is a palpable feeling of being pursued, and the chances of escape are lessened when the pace increases just before the end.

© Brian David 2022

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.

Something fierce, something soundless, I've written in my notebook when planning the string quartet *Pige*. It has been an inspiring task to write a work to be paired with the 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet by Franz Schubert, and the 'Doppelgänger' idea greatly fed my imagination from the very beginning. It's also been an honour to write music for the hugely expressive musicians of the Danish String Quartet.

The first movement *Vorüber, ach, vorüber!* is based on the first half of Schubert's Lied lying behind his 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet. The 'maiden's song' in the beginning of the Lied has not found its way to his string quartet, so I wanted to use this material in mine. The second movement *Daktylus* borrows its idea from the haunting pulse of Schubert's chant of Death. Something fierce and something soundless can be heard here – along with other variants on the dactyl rhythm. For example, I've written a lyrically flowing melody based on the same rhythmic pattern (long-short-short).

Schubert's quartet is wonderful music and of course a cornerstone of the repertoire, and 'death and the maiden' is a strong, tempting and gloomy motif in art history. On the other hand, I just couldn't help seeing the motif also as a – somewhat passé – image of an old male desiring the ultimately young female body. The third movement thus turns its gaze to the girl herself. *Pigen og scrapbogen* ('The Girl and the Scrapbook') is joyful textural music – compiled of fragments and freely handled quotations that might spring to mind when thinking of a vital girl's life.

Pige is Danish for girl. I wish to thank the Danish String Quartet and the co-commissioners for the opportunity to write this music.

© Lotta Wennäkoski 2022

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.