

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 12 January 2024
7.30pm

Quatuor Danel

Marc Danel violin
Gilles Millet violin
Vlad Bogdanas viola
Yovan Markovitch cello

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996) String Quartet No. 2 Op. 3/145 (1939-40, rev. 1986)
I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Allegretto • IV. Presto

String Quartet No. 3 Op. 14 (1944, rev. 1986)
*I. Presto attacca • II. Andante sostenuto attacca •
III. Allegretto*

Interval

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975) String Quartet No. 3 in F Op. 73 (1946)
*I. Allegretto • II. Moderato con moto •
III. Allegro non troppo • IV. Adagio • V. Moderato*

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



Our Audience Fund provides essential unrestricted support for our artistic and learning programmes, connecting thousands of people with music locally, nationally, and internationally. We rely on the generosity of our audience to raise £150,000 each year to support this work. Your gifts are, and continue to be, indispensable. To donate, please visit <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/audiencefund>

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



Weinberg's Second Quartet was written in drastically different circumstances from his First. In September 1939, he had left his family, fled the Nazi invasion of Poland, and headed eastwards to settle in Minsk, where he enrolled on a composition course at the Conservatoire. This strikingly different context partly explains the contrast in musical language in the Second Quartet. Notable influences range from Tchaikovsky to Grieg, though there is still a bedrock of chromaticism. The piece was written in 1939-40 and was performed by a student ensemble in 1941.

The first movement has a tranquil serenade-like character. The gentle excursions away from the breezy opening theme provide material for the rest of the movement. The young composer here focuses on questions of form and theme rather than the overly-busy chromaticism and polyrhythms of the work's predecessor. The movement from firm tonality to adventurous dissonance is smoother in this work and flows gently into the other movements.

The *Andante* second movement is mournful in character, perhaps reflecting the Second Quartet's dedication to Weinberg's mother and sister. Instead of jarring dissonance, here Weinberg opts for uncomfortable juxtapositions, including a seemingly out-of-character dance-like central section. A reprise of the opening theme, now marked by scurrying chromatic accompaniments, highlights the sense of loss felt over the course of this movement.

Weinberg revised this piece in the 1980s, with the most obvious addition being a new movement: the newly-composed *Allegretto* is indicative of his later style. The short movement communicates a sense of ennui-like stillness through a sparse counterpoint that never reaches beyond its opening exchanges.

The *Presto* finale takes a jubilant character, again reminiscent of Tchaikovsky. The theme, itself derived from the middle of the first movement, undergoes a rapid set of variations and developments. The final bars themselves stand apart as odd, with a chromatic flurry that leads to a dissonant pizzicato cluster followed by cold C octaves.

By 1944, Weinberg had moved to Moscow at Shostakovich's invitation. Overall, Weinberg's Third Quartet manages to combine the best elements of its two predecessors: it marks a dramatic return to the chromatic intensity of the First Quartet, while building on some of the formal experiments from the Second.

Cyclic repetition unites the work; the opening four-note figure in the first movement provides much of the melodic material. Beginning with this strident motif, the cello immediately presents a variation before an expanded restatement. The second subject shifts to the distantly-related key of G flat major. The remainder of the movement then becomes a struggle to 'correct' the sense of tonality. The movement comes to a close with an icy rising and falling figure, its tonal ambiguities left open.

The central movement takes an uneven 5/4 time signature and the three lower voices present a plodding figure, over which the first violin takes an optimistic singing line. Tonal ambiguity continues here, as the

opening gesture suggests C minor, moving into C sharp minor. Weinberg contrasts this texture with several achingly beautiful serenade-like passages, which lead an agitated build up towards the powerful climax that gives way to a short reprise of the opening.

The finale presents a restrained variations movement on an initial motif that is derived closely from the first movement theme. Overall, the finale presents a sense of searching that is never quite at ease with itself. In the final bars, the conclusion from the first movement is stated verbatim in an overly-clear effort at cyclic unity. The Third Quartet shows Weinberg's increasing sense of ambition, as well as his command of established forms. From this point on, his quartet writing only became more adventurous.

Shostakovich only completed one full work in 1946, his Third Quartet. The work was performed but was withdrawn soon afterwards. The piece has an air of mystery, of 'something left unsaid', and it is a prime example of the multivalence of Shostakovich's layers of meaning.

The first movement opens with a mischievous theme that is subjected to increasingly aggressive interjections. The second theme is rather more introspective. Shostakovich then presents a complicated counterpoint in the middle, with both themes subjected to distortion. The movement ends with a sense of unease that will continue throughout the work.

A grating viola ostinato opens the second movement. We are now in E minor, a distant relation of the work's F major 'key', further adding to the sense of unease. The movement has a pastoral character, but frequent chromatic interruptions and breaks in texture betray something darker lurking underneath.

The key shifts even further for the third movement *Allegro*: G sharp minor. With echoes of Bartók's quartets, Shostakovich here presents a biting chord with irregular rhythms in the three lower parts, and erratic shifts in pulse create an uneasy march. After a short development, the opening chords are repeated in F minor, as if being further darkened.

In the fourth movement, Shostakovich confronts despair for the first time in his quartets. In passacaglia form, with distinct notes of a funeral march, the movement drifts in key, eventually reaching F major. Repetitions slowly lose energy before moving into the finale without a pause.

The finale is a parade of shifting moods; the opening presents a mournful melody over playful accompaniment which becomes brutalised. At the moment of greatest tension, the previous movement's passacaglia theme re-emerges, though now presented in overly-aggressive contrast. After a frantic development, the work concludes with three gentle F major chords.

Shostakovich attended a rehearsal of the Third Quartet, when 'he sat quite still in silence like a wounded bird, tears streaming down his face'. Just what that significance was for Shostakovich is impossible to say: the work's emotive power is undeniable, however.

© Daniel Elphick 2023

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.