

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 13 February 2025
7.30pm

Kuss Quartet

Jana Kuss violin
Oliver Wille violin
William Coleman viola
Mikayel Hakhnazaryan cello

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet No. 18 in A K464 (1785)
*I. Allegro • II. Menuetto • III. Andante •
IV. Allegro non troppo*

Francisco Coll (b.1985)

String Quartet No. 1 'Códices' *UK première*
Co-commissioned by Kammermusik Basel,
Konzerthaus Berlin, Wigmore Hall, Het
Concertgebouw and Musik 21 Niedersachsen
*I. Cnieu (Spivy) • II. Cantos I (after
Hyperlude V) • III. Quejío • IV. Cantos II*

Interval

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

String Quartet No. 6 BB119 (1939)
*I. Mesto - Vivace • II. Mesto - Marcia •
III. Mesto - Burletta • IV. Mesto*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

March in C K408 *transcribed by Annette Grooß*



UNDER 35S

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'To my dear friend Haydn: A father who had decided to send his children out into the wide world thought it best to entrust them to the protection and guidance of a famous man, who by good fortune also happened to be his best friend. Here they are then, O great Man and dearest Friend, these six children of mine. They are, it is true, the fruit of long and laborious endeavour...' There's never been a dedication quite like the one with which **Mozart** headed the six string quartets that he composed between late 1782 and January 1785. The warmth between the 52-year old Haydn and the 29-year old Mozart was real; so too was their mutual respect. Following Haydn's example as a composer of quartets was no simple matter, and Mozart's 'long and laborious endeavour' is far removed from the Amadeus image of the carefree genius taking down dictation from heaven.

The results can be heard from the very first bars of this, the fourth or fifth of the set to be completed (it's dated January 1785). Mozart seems to have worked on it in parallel with the brilliant B flat major quartet (known as 'The Hunt'), K.465. He often conceived works in contrasted pairs, and there's a warmth and a tender lyricism about K.464 that immediately evokes the spirit of its dedicatee. The opening call (and lyrical response) opens out into a blossoming world of textural and harmonic possibilities, explored in a flowing triple time. The minuet – with its contrasts of unison statements and searching delicacy – more than fulfils Haydn's famous plea for 'a really new minuet'. Mozart rewrote his Andante several times; these characterful variations would be emulated by Beethoven in his Quartet Op.18 No.5 of 1801. And Mozart's finale takes the contrapuntal ingenuity of Haydn's early quartet finales and infuses it with his own, luminous brand of lyrical expression: imitation as the sincerest imaginable form of flattery.

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Song is the driving force behind **Francisco Coll's** first string quartet – melodies and ways of singing that are remembered, encoded and rendered new. The first and third movements are underpinned by folk music. The very opening of the quartet was inspired by a rough but vivid recording from Ukraine that Coll encountered online but which now has disappeared without a trace. Later in the movement, vestiges of a Ukrainian tango are transformed into a wild pasodoble. Taking its title from the pained cries that punctuate flamenco, the third movement is rooted in the sounds and manner of the *cante jondo* tradition. The two *Cantos* movements do not share musical material, but are instead linked by a certain mystical character. The first, written in 2017 as a standalone work for the Cuarteto Casals and itself based on one of Coll's Hyperludes for violin, is both introspective and erotic. Each phrase arches and unfolds within a breath, and emulates the inflections of a human voice.

Cantos II begins with an ending and ends with something of a beginning. The concluding chord of Anton Webern's Five Movements for String Quartet is used as the point of

departure; out of this extraordinary harmony the music becomes very expressive, with hocketting melodies and arabesques emerging from within a chorale. Having begun his quartet in contemporary Ukraine, Coll ends it with the oldest-known piece of notated music: the Hurrian cult hymn. Originating from 12th-century BC Ugarit in Syria, this haunting remnant – also known as the *Hymn to Nikkal* – provides an apt conclusion to these 'Códices'.

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In the summer of 1939, **Bartók** accepted an invitation to stay with the conductor Paul Sacher in Switzerland, and he turned swiftly to a commission for the violinist Zoltán Székely's New Hungarian String Quartet. The quartet that he sketched was in the classical four movements, finishing with a brisk folk-dance finale. But the work that he actually completed back in Budapest in late November was rather different – still in four movements, but with two mordant scherzos, and a slow finale. Something had led him to change his mind.

Meanwhile the political skies were darkening, and war broke out shortly after he began work on the quartet. Bartók sent the completed manuscript directly to Boosey and Hawkes in London, having severed his relationship with the Nazi-controlled Universal Edition in Vienna. Throughout the autumn of 1939, Bartók's mother had been terminally ill (the end finally came on 19 December). The Sixth Quartet wasn't merely the first time he'd used the term *mesto* ('sorrowful') since his Op. 1 (1904): he placed it, with unignorable significance, at the head of all four movements. The same melancholy theme, subtly altered, introduces each of the quartet's first three movements before becoming the actual substance of the finale. The first *Vivace* is the brightest. Written in Bartók's extremely individual sonata form, its singing second subject, marked *con calore* ('with warmth') recurs throughout the work. The second movement explores the characteristic rhythms of the Hungarian *verbunkos* (recruiting dance) in a brilliant range of instrumental colours.

With the *Burletta* the humour moves from the sardonic to the savage, offset by the quiet melancholy of a gentler central episode. The *mesto* theme comes to fulfilment in the slow finale – sinking through haunted reminiscences of the first movement to quiet resignation, and final dissolution in a *pizzicato* chord. It was premièred by the Kolisch Quartet in New York on 20th January 1941, in the presence of the (now exiled) composer.

Mozart almost always wrote with a view to performance, and he wrote three short marches in 1782, most probably in connection with his orchestral concerts in Vienna. The first, in C major and marked *Maestoso*, was originally scored for oboes, horns, trumpets (and possibly timpani – they tended to go with trumpets) and strings, though he later arranged it for keyboard at the request of his wife Constanze. Annette Groöß's string quartet transcription is made in much the same spirit.

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