

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 13 November 2023  
1.00pm

## Julia Fischer Quartet

Julia Fischer violin  
Alexander Sitkovetsky violin  
Nils Mönkemeyer viola  
Benjamin Nyffenegger cello

## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet No. 19 in C K465 'Dissonance' (1785)  
*I. Adagio - Allegro • II. Andante cantabile •  
III. Menuetto. Allegretto • IV. Allegro molto*

## Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

String Quartet No. 2 'Intimate Letters' (1928)  
*I. Andante • II. Adagio • III. Moderato • IV. Allegro*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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**Mozart** probably first met Haydn in Vienna in 1781, although the latter for some years had been vital to Mozart's development as a composer. Mozart was 24 and Haydn 49 when they met. There has been much speculation about their relationship – master and pupil, father and son, a potent connection entwining admiration and affection, two high-flying, prodigiously gifted musicians sparking off each other, a friendship gathering depth by Haydn's acceptance that Mozart was the greater artist.

An important factor of this year was the appearance of Haydn's six Op. 33 'Russian' quartets, composed 'in an entirely new and special style' (Haydn's words). This huge contribution to the style that had not so much developed as erupted over a few 18th-century decades from relatively 'easy-listening' fare into music of far-ranging intellectual and emotional possibilities stood – and continues to stand – the test of repeated playing and listening. Moreover, Haydn's intricate wit in his Op. 33 quartets would not have been lost on Mozart, who played the viola (with the composer on violin) in private performances.

Mozart started work on his six 'Haydn' quartets late in 1782 with K387, the set completed during the winter of 1784–5, and, along with the remarkable sequence of piano concertos composed in 1784, the first half of the 1780s saw Mozart coming of age as a composer, on the brink of the three great Da Ponte operas. He wrote the quartets for himself, and, as suggested by many sketches and corrections, they caused him much difficulty – in the elaborate letter in which he dedicated the set to Haydn, he wrote that they were 'the fruits of a long and laborious study'. It was after one of these quartet evenings, in 1784, that Haydn delivered the now-famous acclamation to Mozart's father Leopold: 'Before God and as an honest man I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name'. His 'tiger-father' Leopold also acknowledged his son's achievement when he wrote in a letter that the instrumental skill he heard (in one of the piano concertos) had brought tears to his eyes.

The 'Dissonance' nickname of K465 derives from the highly chromatic *Adagio* introduction to the first movement, which, although opening on a repeated C pedal note, denies and circles around the home key with some extreme modulations before committing to the taut main *Allegro*. Haydn did something similar – and in the same key of C – in his orchestral introduction to *The Creation* (1798). The *Andante cantabile* relaxes into F major and is charmingly discursive. The minuet has bags of courtly attitude and mischief, with a rather melodramatic trio in

C minor. The *Allegro molto* finale has an ear-worm main theme that suggests a rondo, but it starts off in conventional sonata form, then after the recapitulation expands into more material before closing with casually light-hearted reference to the quartet's opening.

In the summer of 1917, **Leoš Janáček** was on holiday in the spa town of Luhačovice, basking in the previous year's success of the Prague première of his 1903 opera *Jenůfa*, which finally gave him the recognition and acclaim he deserved. Separated from his wife Zdenka, he was alone, and he met there the 26-year-old woman who became his muse for the rest of his life. Kamila Stösslová was married to an antiques dealer, and they had two sons. He fell hopelessly in love with her. While his attentions were flattering, she did not reciprocate his red-hot passion, and the 'affair' was not consummated except in Janáček's fevered imagination.

She inspired *Káťa Kabanová*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *The Makropulos Affair's* Emilia Marty, and *The Diary of One who Disappeared*. Janáček proposed his *Glagolitic Mass* as a nuptial mass, and wrote his second string quartet specifically for her in the space of three weeks, shortly before he died from pneumonia, in 1928. In his will he left her the royalties of various works, including this quartet. Its title was to have been 'Love Letters', and the change to 'Intimate Letters' hardly softens the work's impact. He and she exchanged hundreds of letters, his often exuberantly passionate, and if there was a code in all the notes to be broken, it would probably yield too much information.

The music is bursting with Janáček's inimitable signatures – obsessive ostinatos raising the temperature, irregular snatches of repetitive folk-like melodies that leave the listener desperate for more, his maverick emotional strength and rhythmic vitality, and in a work almost indecently revealing of intensely private matters, it is difficult to disentangle memories, reality, and his reckless, furious love. The writing pushes the players to the limit in terms of effects and often strives for orchestral breadth. In the preface to the score, the first movement is described as an impression of their first meeting. The second refers to summer events in the spa, and the third, which starts as a lilting lullaby, melts into a vision 'that resembles your image'. The fourth aims at expressing how fearful he is at the force of what he has unleashed and his yearning for fulfilment.

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