

WIGMORE HALL 125

Monday 13 October 2025
1.00pm

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective
Elena Urioste violin
Rosalind Ventriss viola
Laura van der Heijden cello
Tom Poster piano

Clara Schumann (1819-1896) Ihr Bildnis Op. 13 No. 1 (1840-3) *arranged by Tom Poster*

Robin Holloway (b.1943) Piano Quartet Op. 143 (2023) *London première*

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor Op. 25 (1861)
*I. Allegro • II. Intermezzo. Allegro ma non troppo – Trio. Animato •
III. Andante con moto • IV. Rondo alla Zingarese. Presto*



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This lunchtime programme brings together music of two dear friends of the 19th Century – Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms – with that of a British composer who holds the music of Brahms and the Schumanns in the highest regard. Robin Holloway's Piano Quartet receives its London première today in the hands of Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective, and it is to Kaleidoscope's artistic director, Tom Poster, that the work is dedicated.

We begin, with **Clara Schumann's** *Ihr Bildnis*, the first of an opus of Lieder that she presented to her husband Robert for his birthday in 1843. The text, by Heinrich Heine, describes the poet staring at a portrait of his beloved which seems almost to come alive at his gaze. Only in the final lines do we learn the truth: 'Ah! I cannot believe that I have lost you,' the poet laments. Schumann's setting is all melancholy tenderness, resignation etched into every curve of its heart-rending melody. In Tom Poster's arrangement, it is the violin which 'sings' Schumann's Lied, the lower strings and piano pulsing softly beneath.

Robin Holloway's extensive compositional oeuvre is rich with works indebted to his musical heroes – from his major orchestral work *Scenes from Schumann* (1960-70) to orchestrations and transcriptions of music by Debussy, JS Bach and Janáček, to name but a few. Fellow composer David Matthews's description of Holloway's musical idiom as 'formed by a productive conflict between Romanticism and Modernism' seems particularly pertinent to the piece we hear today, a Piano Quartet completed in 2023. Not only is this piece one of many in Holloway's catalogue that conforms to a historical genre type (concertos, serenades, string quartets and partitas also appear); its musical fabric seems constantly to hint at the shapes, shades and colours of music by others through the centuries.

Holloway writes that the eight movements of the Quartet are 'interlinked and played continuous. I is a gentle unfolding of little phrases conversing between the players, gradually building to a climax for all four. II, marked *innig*/'inward' – thoughtful, meditative – sets the string trio and the piano in apposition (not opposition!). III is its complement – a *scherzando* – though still retaining the piano/strings division even in its gentler middle section. IV recollects lyric strains from the first movement & takes them elsewhere. V is faster – *cangiante*/'changeable/fickle' – constantly shifting moods and textures, ending in a sudden outburst of pure fury. VI, a fleet spare scherzo, gives each instrument a solo turn – piano first, then (all accompanied by the keyboard) cello, viola, violin; then several alternations of the forces; winding down into VII, even faster, again ending with ferocity. VIII is complete opposite – *andante serioso* – brief epilogue to the whole work, lyric resolution of every previous tension into sweetness & light.'

Holloway has long been fascinated by the music of **Johannes Brahms**, orchestrating his Piano Quintet in 2008 and providing an expansion of the song cycle *Die*

schöne Magelone in 2021 – as well as attempting to 'reconstitute' one of Brahms's earliest symphonic attempts from material from the First Piano Concerto in 2023. So it seems only fitting that our programme closes with the older composer's Piano Quartet in G minor, his first of three such pieces, composed in the autumn of 1861. But to understand the musical roots of this piece, we must first go a little further back in time.

Between 1848 and 1849, Hungary was embroiled in a series of uprisings against the Habsburg Empire. The goal was an independent country, a reformed system of government and an ambitious plan for industrialisation and growth. But the Habsburgs and their allies were too strong. Rebel leaders were executed, and many more arrested as the country was pulled back under Austrian control – leaving supporters of Hungarian independence feeling that their only option was to flee. Hungarian refugees made their way west, some with the hope of staying in Europe and others planning to make for the United States. And that is why, as the teenaged Brahms was busy studying music in the late 1840s and early 1850s, he suddenly found his home city, the thriving port of Hamburg, newly filled with émigrés. It is no coincidence that the two professional violinists Brahms first counted among his friends and colleagues, Eduard Reményi and Joseph Joachim, were themselves both Hungarian.

When people travel, music travels, too... but there were complications. Although there were plenty of Hungarian composers and performers, their music was sometimes muddled up with that of the *Zigeuner*, the Roma. By the time Brahms wrote his Piano Quartet in G minor in the autumn of 1861, he was more than aware of these travelling musical influences and wanted to incorporate some into his newest works – so he chose to describe the finale as 'alla Zingarese', a designation used decades earlier by Haydn to conflate the *Ungarisch* and *Zigeunerisch*.

Brahms sent the work to the composer and violinist Joseph Joachim, excited to hear his thoughts, but also confessing that 'It frightens me to think of all the things I wanted to improve.' Joachim responded with great enthusiasm and expressed particular admiration for Brahms's toe-tapping finale, which is built from a succession of brilliant and virtuosic Hungarian-style dance episodes. 'You have completely defeated me on my own territory!', he told his friend. The rest of the Quartet is bordering on symphonic in its scope and palette: big themes in the opening *Allegro*, and textures that turn the ensemble into a rich, sonorous mini-orchestra. Brahms writes equally expansive melodies in his middle movements, including a characteristically long-breathed and heartfelt *Andante*. On Clara Schumann's advice, the irresistibly pulsing *Scherzo* was relabelled *Intermezzo*, its restless energy already hinting at the stamp and sway of the finale to come.

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