

WIGMORE HALL 125

Monday 13 October 2025
7.30pm

Chiaroscuro Quartet

Alina Ibragimova violin
Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux violin
Emilie Hörnlund viola
Claire Thirion cello
Cédric Tiberghien piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in F minor Op. 20 No. 5 (1772)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Menuetto •
III. Adagio • IV. Fuga a 2 soggetti*

String Quartet in D Op. 20 No. 4 (1772)

*I. Allegro di molto • II. Un poco adagio affetuoso •
III. Menuetto. Allegretto alla zingarese – Trio •
IV. Presto scherzando*

Interval

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Piano Quintet in E flat Op. 44 (1842)

*I. Allegro brillante • II. In modo d'una marcia. Un poco
largamente – Agitato • III. Scherzo. Molto vivace •
IV. Allegro ma non troppo*



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The running order for this concert has changed since these programme notes were written.

In 1772, when the six Opus 20 String Quartets were written, **Josef Haydn** was 12 years into his three-decade tenure as Kapellmeister to Prince Nikolaus Esterházy. Job security came at a price: Haydn and his court musicians had to spend most of the working year at the Eszterháza Palace in Hungary. Splendid though it was, the palace was miles from Vienna or any other centre of culture and sophistication. Isolated from their families, breathing the stale air of the surrounding swampland, the musicians frequently suffered from depression.

It would be wrong to claim that the Op. 20 Quartets were a resultant expression of gloom, since they abound with the composer's customary wit and energy. But the choice of a minor key for two of the works, and the adoption of 'serious' fugues for the finales of three, indicate that frivolity has been somewhat restrained. The six Quartets represent a considerable advance in the technique of writing for the four instruments. Most notably they rely less on the first violin to carry the tune, distributing the melodies within the texture so that all four instruments are part of the conversation.

When the publishing firm Hummel brought out an (unauthorised) edition of Op. 20 in 1779, the cover was emblazoned with a picture of the sun. Consequently the set is sometimes known as the 'Sun' Quartets – appropriately for a new dawn in chamber music.

While they collectively represent a leap forward, individually the six quartets have very distinct characters. No. 4 is predominantly a playful affair, though the *Adagio* is rooted throughout in the sombre key of D minor – in a variation movement such as this, it is most unusual for Haydn not to try an excursion into the major. The opening *Allegro* makes extensive use of three repeated notes as a recurrent motif, and unusual phrase lengths and sudden pauses show us that Haydn is in a mood to confound expectations. The offbeat accents of the *alla Zingarese* minuet would wrongfoot anyone attempting to dance it, and the scurrying finale, too, uses elements of Hungarian modality to add flavour.

When compiling his own catalogue of his compositions, Haydn placed No. 5 as the first of the Op. 20 Quartets. Had it been published in that position it would have served as a declaration of intent, since it is an imposing affair in a serious key, crowned with a fugal finale.

The first theme of the opening movement is divided into two distinct paragraphs, with the second subject (in A flat major) emerging out of the texture with a rising octave. The coda of this movement is unusually expansive and complex. We stay in F minor for the purposeful minuet, meaning that the F major trio section comes as a welcome shaft of sunlight. F major is also the key of the lilting *Adagio*, with the theme retaining its shape through repetitions while the first violin is free to

carol blithely and elaborately above it. The concluding fugue proceeds quietly for much of its length, but is interrupted with sudden *forte* exclamations.

By the time he came to write the Piano Quintet, **Robert Schumann** had already composed his three String Quartets in the preceding months of 1842, his 'year of chamber music'. The incorporation of his own instrument, the piano, must have felt like a return to home ground. The Quintet was begun on 23 September and completed in fair-copy full score by 12 October.

The pianist at the first performance was its dedicatee, the composer's wife, Clara, who championed it throughout her career. (For her pains, she received the comment from Robert that she played it badly, and that only a man could do it justice.) Illness caused Clara to withdraw from the second performance and make way for Felix Mendelssohn, who sight-read the piano part and afterwards suggested that the composer replace the original second trio of the *Scherzo* with one of greater vitality. Schumann duly obliged.

The first movement begins with a vigorous striding forth; the shape and detail of this theme provides the material for much of what follows. The second subject is introduced by cello and viola in dialogue. The development section begins with a descent into darkness, followed by passages in which the piano asserts its full strength against the massed strings. The return of the eager first subject cannot be delayed for long, however, and the coda is brisk in keeping with the sweep of the whole movement.

The second movement is a slow march with a ghostly, reluctant tread. Unconventional use of pizzicato and the hollow extreme bass register of the piano add to the disconcerting effect. A more easily flowing second idea emerges, though its feints to the major are unconvincing, and the dread trudge of the opening soon returns. The two main subjects maintain their uneasy equilibrium before a final major chord offers a mere glimmer of light.

The *Scherzo* is characterised by hither and thither scampering, sometimes wild, sometimes coy. The first trio, like the episodes of comparative tranquillity in earlier movements, seems strangely static and tentative, while the second has the twang of an Eastern European folk dance.

The finale begins not in the home key but in a sort of midway point between C minor and G minor. Although we are destined to end in a blaze of E flat major, it is hard to tell precisely when we reach it. The main theme of the first movement returns in stages, eventually becoming part of a fugue in which it combines with the finale's material. Its confidence gradually permeates the entire texture and speeds us to a firmly optimistic conclusion.

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