

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 14 April 2025
1.00pm

Chaos String Quartet

Susanne Schäffer violin
Eszter Kruchió violin
Sara Marzadori viola
Bas Jongen cello

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

String Quartet in E flat D87 (1813)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Scherzo. Prestissimo •
III. Adagio • IV. Allegro*

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

String Quartet No. 2 (1968)

*I. Allegro nervoso • II. Sostenuto, molto calmo •
III. Come un meccanismo di precisione •
IV. Presto furioso, brutale, tumultuoso •
V. Allegro con delicatezza*

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

3 Divertimenti for string quartet (1936)

*I. March. Allegro maestoso • II. Waltz. Allegretto •
III. Burlesque. Presto*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25



Membership at Wigmore Hall

Join from just £25 a month and enjoy early access to tickets for the 2025/26 Anniversary Season.

Priority Booking for Autumn 2025 is now open ahead of General Sale on Wednesday 23 April.

wigmore-hall.org.uk/membership | 020 7258 8230



Join & Support
Membership

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



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



We know the precise date on which **Franz Schubert's** voice broke – 16 July 1812 – since he noted it down on the sheet of music he had been singing from in Vienna's Imperial Court Chapel. Having in his own words 'crowded for the last time' as a choirboy, he lost his place as a student in the Imperial Seminary. He thus faced a perennial dilemma for boys of his age – whether to seek further education or look for employment.

The decision he took gave him the opportunity to increase his musical activities without the burden of academic studies in other subjects. It meant accepting an offer to teach at the school run by his father, over whose premises the Schubert family lived. Happily this situation offered quite an advantage for an aspiring teenage composer: a houseful of talented amateur musicians who could try out new works.

Straight away Franz began writing string quartets for the family ensemble. He played viola, with his older brothers playing the violin parts and his father as cellist. These quartets may be regarded as study works, with the models of Haydn very much in mind. But while they do not compare with the grandeur and intensity of Schubert's mature chamber works, they are highly attractive pieces fully deserving of a wider audience than friends and family.

The E flat Quartet D87 is the most performed of these early quartets. It was written in November 1813, the year the composer turned 16. All four movements are in the home key; the first, third and fourth are in sonata form and the second is a *Scherzo* rather than the more commonly encountered minuet (though both Haydn and Beethoven had already written plenty of quartets with scherzos).

Composers are sometimes, if not always, very good at explaining how and why they wrote particular works. **György Ligeti** had some particularly interesting and enlightening things to say about the different circumstances under which he composed his two string quartets.

The first, titled 'Métamorphoses nocturnes', was written in Budapest in 1953–54. Ligeti was still living in his native Hungary, making his living from teaching music as well as writing it. He described the First Quartet as 'written for the drawer, because a performance was out of the question'. The country was in the tight grip of communism, and anything remotely 'modern' in art was banned as dangerous. Even Impressionist paintings had been removed from the walls of art galleries and put in storage. Heavily influenced by Bartók (frowned upon by the authorities as a progressive), the First Quartet was not taken out of 'the drawer' for public performance until 1958, two years after Ligeti had escaped to Vienna.

The Second Quartet was composed in 1968. In Ligeti's words: 'In the 15 years between the two quartets, the axis of my life and my compositional thinking had turned 180 degrees. In February 1957 I

came to Cologne, learned the technique of electronic sound production and came into contact with the Western European composers of my generation. I learned a lot from Stockhausen, Boulez and [Gottfried Michael] Koenig and from other composers of the Cologne-Darmstadt-Paris avant-garde. Webern and Debussy also had a decisive influence on me, but I never gave up my attachment to Bartók.'

As a result of his immersion in the Western European avant-garde, Ligeti's music soon acquired an immense density of texture; then he gradually reduced the number of polyphonic voices while retaining essential features of the style that had evolved. Ligeti called the Second String Quartet 'an end point' in this process. Its language is based on the development of textures rather than motifs or melody.

The first movement chops and changes between fast and slow music and is entirely different in effect from the second movement – yet the second movement is essentially a slow-motion version of the first. The third movement uses pizzicato techniques derived from Ligeti's beloved Bartók, and incorporates one of Ligeti's favourite ideas, clockwork ticking to suggest a machine starting to break down. To quote the composer again, the fourth movement is 'extremely condensed, brutal, threatening', and closely related to the first movement. Finally, we have a movement that is 'like a memory seen through fog: the entire course of the piece so far is recapitulated, but softened – the music sounds as if from afar.'

In 1933 the 20-year-old **Benjamin Britten**, then a student at the Royal College of Music, started work on a projected five-movement work for string quartet. The somewhat oxymoronic title was to be *Alla quartetto serioso, Go play, boy, play*, the individual movements being envisaged as portraits of particular friends from his schooldays. Some of the pieces received unofficial plays-through over the next few years, and there were frequent revisions. The first movement, *Alla marcia*, was replaced; material from the original would find a circuitous way into the song cycle *Les Illuminations*. Two other movements were dropped.

The work finally arrived on the platform of Wigmore Hall on 25 February 1936 as *3 Divertimenti*, with the *Go play, boy, play* subtitle still appended. Performed by the Stratton Quartet, the movements were now called *March, Waltz* and *Burlesque*, the latter explicitly dedicated to Francis Barton, a close companion of Britten's in prep school days. The hyper-sensitive Britten thought that the London audience 'sniggered' at the première, and thus the music remained unpublished until after his death. These days performances are usually snigger-free; the problem was perhaps the twee-sounding subtitle rather than the music.

© Brian David 2025

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.