

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 14 November 2024
7.30pm

Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre violin
Harumi Rhodes violin
Richard O'Neill viola
András Fejér cello

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in B flat Op. 76 No. 4 'Sunrise' (1797)
*I. Allegro con spirito • II. Adagio • III. Menuet.
Allegro • IV. Finale. Allegro ma non troppo*

Nokuthula Ngwenyama (b.1976)

Flow (2022-3) (London première)
*I. Prelude: Tear in space/time
Epoch of reionization, B = H for hydrogen
Epoch of reionization, BE = He for helium
II. Lento
Pranayama –
III. Quark scherzo
IV. Finale. Andante –
Enjoy and go with the flow*

Interval

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 7 in F Op. 59 No. 1 'Razumovsky'
(1806)
*I. Allegro • II. Allegretto vivace e sempre
scherzando • III. Adagio molto e mesto •
IV. Thème russe. Allegro*

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When **Haydn** began work on his six string quartets Op. 76 in 1796, he was 64 years old. In the late 18th Century, when average life expectancy was in the mid-to-late 40s, that was considered remarkable enough. But for a composer in his mid-60s to write music that was so adventurous, so imaginative and so joyously, vibrantly alive was especially striking.

The fourth quartet of the set takes its nickname from the long, ascending melody at the very opening of the work. It sounds so effortless and natural that the comparison with a sunrise suggested itself easily to the work's earliest listeners; that the second subject is simply this opening theme turned upside down is a magnificent example of Haydn's mature imagination finding the unexpected within the (superficially) obvious. The *Adagio* is one of Haydn's great hymn-like late slow movements; a gentle sextuplet-figure brings poignancy to the central and closing sections. The *Menuet*, as so often in Haydn, is more of a scherzo than a courtly dance, and this one has a hint of waltz-rhythm about it, while the trio evokes the pungent folk-harmonies of Haydn's rural youth. Haydn concludes with a brief but dazzlingly-worked sonata *Finale*, rounded off by an unusually lengthy coda that actually increases in inventiveness and brilliance as it speeds towards the finish. This sun has well and truly risen. © **Richard Bratby 2024**
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Come in and out of silence

Tone swirling in the balance.

Nothing, then everything

Waving into space.

Then light.

And after a longer while

Air.

And now sixteen strings manually animated

Vibrating through time.

When Harumi Rhodes of the Takács Quartet asked me about writing a piece for the group I was surprised, greatly honoured and fearful. The string quartet is considered a 'perfect' ensemble. It inspires delicacy, sensitivity and adventure. The core range is smaller than that of the piano, yet its timbre allows for beautiful interplay. Harumi asked that the quartet be about anything in the natural world, an idea requested by lead commissioner Cal Performances. Fortunately, patterns in music and science pair well, so that brought relief. I researched a wide array of subjects for over a year, including the life cycle, carbon reclamation, environmental protection, animal communication, startling murmurations, our last universal common ancestor (LUCA), black hole collisions and the subatomic realm. I also listened to the recordings of the Takács Quartet with gusto. Systems layered upon other systems revealed a common flow to existence tying us to the initial outburst of energy and matter at the birth of our universe. *Flow* starts like gas seeping from an infinitely full balloon about to pop. Then, as matter inflates space, climactic material is presented almost immediately before abruptly burning out for the universal dark ages. The *Prelude* examines 'B'ing/BE'ing' melodically

and harmonically through moments of *pranayama* (the transformative power of breath). It ends with a trailing 'Om'. The *Lento* brings further cooling and space in chorale around an octave B-centric pedal. Prelude motifs are given space to develop.

Quark scherzo explores our fundamentally playful selves. The subatomic realm waltzes up and down while we embrace ideas of solidity and ego. The trio provides no break and instead intones a ballad over cello triplets. The movement ends in a virtuosic flurry. The *Finale* settles into a stylized recitative where three lower strings solo before coming together to feature a soaring treble voice. Flowing triplets turn into a Classical Indian *Dadra tal* (even six beat) rhythm in the bass line while upper strings bow the sides of their instruments simulating Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) radiation. Upper strings join via *pizzicati glissandi*. There is a return to the *Prelude* opening, then a slingshot into ecstatic startling murmurations. Lower strings continue unrelentingly while violin lines chase one another, instantaneously turning and merging. They eventually land, and the sky calms through long D overtone *glissando*. A retreating *tremolo* reveals a melody first played by the viola, then shared throughout the ensemble to joyful conclusion. © **Nokuthula Ngwenyama 2024**
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Count Andreas Kirillovich Razumovsky was the Russian ambassador to the Court of Vienna. Described as 'an enemy of Revolution but a friend of the fairer sex', he was also – until his Viennese palace was destroyed by fire in 1814 – a devoted patron of **Beethoven**. His household string quartet, led by the great violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, performed Beethoven's music and had a lasting influence on Beethoven's quartet style.

Those influences define the three string quartets Op. 59 that Razumovsky commissioned from Beethoven, and which Beethoven completed in 1806. The sweeping, gloriously expansive cello melody with which Op. 59 No. 1 opens is one such fingerprint; Linke, the cellist of Razumovsky's quartet, was generally reckoned to have the finest tone in Europe, and Beethoven wrote to suit his performer. The same goes for the fantastic, cadenza-like violin passage for first violin at the end of the *Adagio*. Clearly written for Schuppanzigh, this is the string quartet stepping out of the amateur drawing-room and into the world of the professional virtuoso ensemble. And then there's the jaunty first subject from which Beethoven builds his massive finale – the *Thème russe*, allegedly an authentic Russian folksong, inserted purely as a compliment to Razumovsky. A creative compromise? Far from it. The three 'Razumovsky' quartets broke new ground for the string quartet, in scale, in difficulty and in sheer imagination. This was widely recognised: 'Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven quartets...are attracting the attention of all connoisseurs' reported a Leipzig critic in 1807. 'They are profoundly thought through and admirably worked out, but not to be grasped by all'.

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