

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 15 February 2023  
7.30pm

Supported by The Dorset Foundation - in memory of Harry M Weinrebe

## Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky violin

Sergei Bresler violin

Ori Kam viola

Kyril Zlotnikov cello

Elisabeth Leonskaja 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*

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

String Quartet in F Op. 96 'American' (1893)

*I. Allegro ma non troppo • II. Lento •*

*III. Molto vivace • IV. Finale. Vivace ma non troppo*

Interval

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Piano Quintet in G minor Op. 57 (1940)

*I. Prelude. Lento • II. Fugue. Adagio •*

*III. Scherzo. Allegretto • IV. Intermezzo. Lento •*

*V. Finale. Allegretto*



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During his time as Vice-Kapellmeister to the Esterházy family, **Haydn** was not allowed to take on outside commissions or seek publications of his work. But with his ascent to head of the music staff in 1766, he had much greater freedom, as witnessed in the composition of his Op. 20 string quartets in 1772. Issued by Chevardière in Paris two years later, they also appeared in print in Vienna, thanks to Artaria, and finally in London.

Rare among contemporary sets, Haydn's Op. 20 features two minor-key quartets. The F minor, published fifth, was the first to be composed. It is a pensive work, whose snaking theme is haunted by an unstable accompaniment. When cast in the relative major, the thematic material becomes more confident, though self-assurance is brief, and the volatile accompaniment soon returns to undermine the new key. While the development section has a much sunnier exterior, it is also riven with chromaticism, which eventually forces the theme back to its origins.

The ensuing minuet is a brusque, lopsided dance. The trio gives the movement grounding – including a flash of the tonic major – but is ultimately no less wayward than the dance that surrounds it. F major again provides the basis for the lilting *Adagio* in which, after an initial statement, the first violin spins effortless threads around the main theme.

The finale is rooted in the contrapuntal practice of Johann Joseph Fux, a major figure within contemporary Viennese musical teaching. And yet the propulsion of Haydn's fugue is anything but studied, with rising dynamics leading to a *fortissimo* canon, as well as revealing the inner drive for which the earlier movements longed.

When the philanthropist Jeanette Thurber asked **Dvořák** to come to New York, she had a clear task in mind: the Czech composer was to teach the students at her National Conservatory of Music how to find wealth in native traditions. After a full academic year in the role, during which Dvořák heard the young black student composer Harry Burleigh sing spirituals and plantation songs, as well as researching indigenous American traditions, he spent the summer of 1893 in Iowa.

With its sizeable Czech population, the village of Spillville offered a home from home, with the fellowship of expatriates and a fresh interest in Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* – encouraged by a visit to the local Minnehaha Falls – prompting several new works. One of the highlights, written that June, was Dvořák's 'American' Quartet, which is consequently filled with voices from both sides of the Atlantic.

It opens with breezy, rustic music, featuring snap rhythms, drones and pentatonic melodies, altogether giving the impression of 'home on the range'. The choice of key may well point to Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony, though the tertiary modulation to the more immediately Czech second subject recalls similar transitions in the work of Dvořák's friend Brahms. The

slow movement certainly pines as much for home as it speaks of the composer's embrace of life in the US, though a tense central section marks significant contrast after the easy charms of the *Allegro ma non troppo*.

The scherzo features a high, chirruping violin, supposedly inspired by the call of the scarlet tanager, a bird Dvořák heard near Spillville. But there is intensity too, with the second section disturbing the unruffled mood – and thereby mirroring the contrasts of the *Lento*. The *Finale*, on the other hand, shows much greater resolve. Recalling Dvořák's popular *Slavonic Dances*, the composer pits energetic music against a more refined chorale, the latter pregnant with longing. Yet despite the sense of homesickness contained within, this quartet ends on a positive note.

**Shostakovich** wrote his Piano Quintet in 1940 as a vehicle for himself and the Beethoven Quartet, who were to become long-term collaborators. At the time of writing, however, the composer was all too aware of the gagging power of the regime, even before a series of decrees were issued by Stalin's propagandist in chief, Andrei Zhdanov. The authorities had already indicated that Soviet music should be a 'truthful and historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development', with Shostakovich's caustic opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* falling foul of those guidelines. His Fifth Symphony of 1937 attempted to provide an apology – and largely succeeded – yet the advent of World War II meant that any further large-scale projects were likely to be postponed, forcing Shostakovich's focus inward. His imagination, however, was hardly reduced by the changes. Instead, the pressure from the regime, the ongoing hostilities and the weight of public expectation provoked an even more torrid, fixated idiom, as witnessed in this Quintet.

Cast in five movements, it opens with Baroque poise, albeit heard through a 20th-century prism. The lines of the first movement's fantasia, first in the piano and then the strings, are increasingly bold but cold. A lighter, more dance-like vein emerges, though the whole structure is dominated instead by a *Fugue*, rising from the embers. This, in turn, will deliver a searing climax but few answers.

In response, the *Scherzo* proves brief. Thrown away with abandon, its vicious *danse macabre* suggests a link to the brutally breezy language of the symphonies, as well as uniting the players for the first time. The *Intermezzo* that follows returns to a more detached language, its quasi-passacaglia tinged with passion and, later, regret. So it is left to the Quintet's hurrahing *Finale* to override any lasting insecurities by delivering the G major homecoming so often hinted at within preceding movements. As with the last bars of the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich's intentions remain unclear, though it was evidently enough for the Party, who awarded the Quintet the inaugural Stalin Prize in 1941 and 100,000 roubles.

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