

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 15 July 2025
7.30pm

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Elena Urioste violin
Savitri Grier violin
Melissa White violin
Nathan Amaral violin
Rosalind Ventris viola
Edgar Francis viola
Laura van der Heijden cello
Tony Rymer cello

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969)

Quartet for Four violins (1949)

*I. Allegretto – Allegro giocoso •
II. Andante tranquillo • III. Molto allegro*

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

String Sextet in A Op. 48 (1878)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Dumka. Poco allegretto •
III. Furiant. Presto • IV. Finale. Tema con variazioni.
Allegretto grazioso, quasi andantino*

Interval

George Enescu (1881-1955)

String Octet in C Op. 7 (1900)

*I. Très modéré • II. Très fougueux • III. Lentement •
IV. Mouvement de valse bien rythmée*



UNDER 35S

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To compose – from the Latin, *componere* – means to put together, and this evening's programme traces a number of ways of putting together the sound of string instruments – a sonic kaleidoscope, as it were, of timbres and textures.

Born in Łódź in 1909, **Bacewicz** studied in both her native city and in Warsaw, before moving to Paris in the 1930s. There, her teachers included Nadia Boulanger, whose neoclassical influence was paramount in the development of her own musical voice. Returning to Poland on the eve of the Second World War, Bacewicz established a reputation as a performer (she was an outstanding violinist and pianist), as well as a leading composer. She died in 1969, the recipient of an impressive number of composition prizes at both Polish and international festivals (Warsaw in 1949, Liège in 1951, Paris in 1960, and Brussels in 1965).

The Quartet for 4 Violins dates from 1949 and was written for Bacewicz's students at the Łódź Conservatory. Poland was now a communist state, and Soviet influence on all aspects of society was pervasive. Creative artists were subject to censorship and expected to conform to the doctrine of Socialist Realism, yet Bacewicz managed to navigate the dictates of ideology with integrity and imagination. Written in three short movements, the Quartet combines the elegant proportions of classical form with the lively dance rhythms of traditional folk music, especially in the outer movements. The reflective tone of the middle movement hints at more private emotions.

If Bacewicz's music sometimes sounds like her near contemporaries, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, then it also harks back to other composers from Central Europe who had infused the Western European forms of chamber music with the intonations of their own homelands. In 1878, **Dvořák** did just that in his String Sextet, written in the space of two weeks in May 1878. He had been making a name for himself in his native Bohemia for some time but was understandably keen to establish himself internationally. He entered a competition for the Austrian State Prize for Composition in 1874, which he duly received on the recommendation of Brahms. He was awarded the prize again in 1876 and 1877, and in 1878, Brahms persuaded his publisher to commission Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*.

Dvořák would certainly have been familiar with the two string sextets that Brahms had composed in 1860 and 1864-65, and the sophisticated handling of long-range structure in both the opening *allegro moderato* and the concluding *Tema con variazioni* owes a great deal to Brahms's example. It is, though, in the middle movements that Dvořák's own voice comes through most vividly. The second movement is a *dumka*, a Ukrainian term for a reflective, ballad-like song that was widely taken up by composers from Central

Europe – there are famous examples by Chopin and Moniuszko in Poland and by Lysenko in Ukraine itself. By way of contrast comes a *furiant*, a lively Bohemian folkdance, tamed for the space of the salon. The sextet was first heard in a private performance led by Brahms's great friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim, in Berlin in the summer of 1879, followed by a public première in that same city on 9 November. This was the first of Dvořák's works to be premièred abroad, and his compositions would be heard with increasing frequency across Western Europe and eventually in the United States.

Enescu entered the Vienna Conservatory in 1888 at the age of 7, dazzling the city's musical and social circles with his prodigious brilliance. He then headed to Paris, studying there between 1895 and 1899 and soaking up everything that contemporary life in the French capital could offer him. As he later recalled: 'I felt myself evolving rapidly, I was becoming myself. Until then, I was fumbling. From that moment I felt able to walk on my own legs, even if not yet to run very fast.' The String Octet in C was one of the first works he composed after he graduated from the Paris Conservatory. Although clearly harking back to the youthful Octet composed by the teenage Mendelssohn in 1825, Enescu's conception of musical architecture and sonority feels more like the product of late romanticism and even early modernism. It is certainly an ambitious score, even for a composer as naturally gifted – and well trained – as Enescu was. Mendelssohn may have been able to dash off his octet in a matter of weeks, but Enescu worked on his for well over a year. As he confessed: 'I was gripped by a problem of construction: I wanted to write this Octet in four connected movements, in such a way that although each movement would have its own independent existence, the whole piece would form a single movement in sonata form, on a huge scale. I was crushing myself with the effort of keeping aloft a piece of music in four sections, of such length that each one of them seemed about to fall apart at any moment. No engineer putting his first suspension bridge across a river can have agonized more than I did as I gradually filled my manuscript paper with notes.' It was not just the composer who struggled with its demands. After five tortuous rehearsals, the first performers abandoned the planned première, and it was not until 18 December 1909 that it was finally premièred. The Octet achieves a rare sense of structural coherence, deftly synthesising the four movements of the classical symphony into a dramatic multi-section whole. Enescu even suggested that it might be performed by an entire symphony orchestra, with moments to be entrusted to soloists in the manner of a *concerto grosso*.

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