

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 19 October 2021 7.30pm

Pavel Haas Quartet

Veronika Jarůšková violin

Marek Zwiebel violin

Luosha Fang viola

Peter Jarůšek cello

Pavel Nikl viola

Boris Giltburg piano



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

String Quintet in G Op. 111 (1890)

I. Allegro non troppo, ma con brio • II. Adagio •

III. Un poco allegretto • IV. Vivace ma non troppo presto

Interval

Piano Quintet in F minor Op. 34 (1862)

I. Allegro non troppo • II. Andante, un poco adagio •

III. Scherzo. Allegro • IV. Finale. Poco sostenuto -

Allegro non troppo - Presto non troppo

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Unlike many other composers in the second half of the 19th Century, **Brahms** remained loyal to the traditions of the past. Whilst Wagner devoted himself to music drama and Liszt explored the innovative possibilities of the orchestral tone poem and the dazzling piano showpiece, Brahms found that there was still much to be said through the medium of the sonata and the symphony. Similarly, his extensive body of chamber music built on the legacy of Mozart and Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert, Schumann and Mendelssohn. Moreover, despite an undeservedly aloof and academic reputation, Brahms was able to channel his strongly felt, but often well-concealed emotions into the seemingly abstract forms of instrumental music.

The works that make up this evening's programme highlight Brahms's lifelong devotion to the chamber repertoire. When Brahms composed his String Quintet in G Op. 111, he intended it to be his final work. It is not, though, a work of melancholy farewell, but a confident and masterly statement of his still fertile creative imagination (he would, in fact, go on to write more compositions before his death in April 1897). Based on sketches that he had made for a possible fifth symphony, it displays an often sweeping scope of almost orchestral sonority. An arching, expansive melody on the cello announces the bustle and bravura of the first movement, although there are moments where the music yields momentarily to a sweeter, more reflective mood. The sorrowful eloquence of the ensuing Adagio is first stated by the first viola, before being passed from voice from voice, whilst a measured, pizzicato figure in the cello lends the movement an underlying sense of forward motion that undercuts any sentimentality. The third movement is surprisingly introspective, even tentative, and has none of the ebullience of a conventional scherzo or minuet. Instead, it feels like a wistful evocation of a youthful waltz as recalled by the composer in his maturity, and its themes hark back to the world of Schubert and Mendelssohn. After a false start in the minor, the finale returns to the sunlit disposition of the first movement, although it is predominantly charming and

delicate, rather than heroic. Only in the final bars – marked *animato* – does Brahms finally shake off any lingering sense of urbane decorum, and the movement concludes with all the energy of a lively country dance.

The Piano Quintet in F minor Op. 34 began life in 1862 as a string quintet, scored for two violins, viola and two cellos. Explicitly modelled on Schubert's famous quintet of 1828, it contains a number of other allusions to this work. Clara Schumann praised the new composition enthusiastically, but Joseph Joachim was critical of some of its string writing, so Brahms destroyed the score, rewriting it in 1864 as a sonata for two pianos instead (this version survives and makes for fascinating listening). When Clara Schumann performed this version, she noted perceptively that 'it is not a sonata, rather a work whose ideas you could – and should – distribute among the whole orchestra'. Brahms did not go quite that far, but did recast it as a quintet for piano and strings, thereby also paying tribute to Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet, Op. 44, of 1842.

There is at least one further musical debt to be heard in Brahms's quintet. Its key of F minor, as well as the opening gestures of its first movement, recall Beethoven's 'Appassionata' sonata, and for all of Brahms's sophisticated grasp of musical structure, it is perhaps the quintet's impulsive, tempestuous rhetoric that makes it such a commanding work. The second movement offers a moment of inward reflection, full of wistful yearning, and in the scherzo and trio, a march-like theme is offset by filigree moments of skittish invention. After a hesitantly chromatic, almost ghostly introduction, the finale gradually builds to its relentless and insistent conclusion, in which dance-like elements suggest the influence of Hungarian or Slavonic folk music.

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