

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 20 October 2022
7.30pm

Wigmore Soloists

Isabelle van Keulen violin
Adrien La Marca viola
Michael Collins clarinet
Tim Gibbs double bass
Robin O'Neill bassoon
Alberto Menéndez Escribano horn
Michael McHale piano
Torleif Thedéen cello

Franz Berwald (1796-1868)

Septet in B flat (?1828)

*I. Adagio - Allegro molto • II. Poco adagio •
III. Finale. Allegro con spirito*

Alexander Zemlinsky (1871-1942)

Clarinet Trio in D minor Op. 3 (1896)

I. Allegro ma non troppo • II. Andante • III. Allegro

Interval

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Septet in E flat Op. 20 (1799)

*I. Adagio - Allegro con brio • II. Adagio cantabile •
III. Tempo di menuetto • IV. Tema con variazioni.
Andante • V. Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace •
VI. Andante con molto alla marcia - Presto*

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Franz Berwald (1796-1868) is remembered now primarily for his four symphonies, a compliment not extended to him during his lifetime. He was born in Stockholm into a family of professional musicians. His father, a violinist in the Royal Opera Orchestra – then Sweden's only permanent orchestra – taught the violin to his son, who started playing for the orchestra when he was only 16 while also receiving lessons in composing. After his father died in 1825, Berwald received a royal scholarship to study composition in Berlin, where he stayed during the 1830s, working mainly on operas where he considered his fortunes to lie. He stopped composing when, in 1835, necessity drove him to make a living from a clinic he established in Berlin specialising in orthopaedics and physiotherapy. This was a success, and the medical equipment designed by him was still being used well into the next century.

When he moved to Vienna in 1841 he started composing again – the symphonies date from this time – but by the end of the 1840s he was back in Sweden where success, even recognition, eluded him, to the extent that during the summers in the 1850s he managed a sawmill and a glassworks in the north of the country. Because of prolonged absences, he didn't promote himself at home, and his reputation for being difficult was hardly going to help him.

There is a photograph of him taken in the 1860s that suggests a dour and severe individual, but, written back in c.1828, before he left Sweden for Berlin, his Septet in B flat sounds relaxed and carefree. Scored for the same group Beethoven used for his Septet – clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello and double bass – Berwald's comes across as a confident, sunny serenade, with a lovely role for horn as pivot between woodwind and strings. It opens with a mock-solemn introduction that echoes Mozart in his K361 Gran Partita, quickly delivering a broad *Allegro molto* with clarinet and first violin taking the melodic lead. The *Poco adagio* middle movement has a scherzo-like middle section, with a fugal episode turning back to the *Adagio* music, and the *Finale* is a witty *Allegro con spirito*.

Alexander Zemlinsky (1871-1942) could hardly have been closer to music in Vienna as it moved from late-Romantic opulence to the breakdown in tonality in the first decades of the 20th Century. At the Vienna Conservatory his teachers included Anton Bruckner, and Zemlinsky in turn taught counterpoint to the younger (by three years) Arnold Schoenberg, the only conventional instruction the latter ever took. The two were close friends, and in 1901 Schoenberg married Zemlinsky's sister Mathilde. Zemlinsky also had an affair with Alma Schindler, one of his composition students, who in the end found him not well enough known and only his hands physically attractive, and instead moved on to Mahler.

Zemlinsky was a conservative, who never ventured into his brother-in-law's atonal and serial composition method. He was championed by Brahms, who held him in high regard, and was supported in his conducting career by Mahler. From 1911 to 1927 he was working at the Landestheater in Prague, and after a spell at Berlin's Kroll Theater under Otto Klemperer, he moved to Vienna as

the Nazi Party became more powerful. He had been brought up as a Jew, and in 1938 he and his wife followed Schoenberg to the USA, where Zemlinsky died, unknown and neglected, in New York in 1942.

Zemlinsky presented his youthful Piano Trio in D minor Op. 3 in response to a composers' competition in 1896 sponsored by the Viennese Society of Musicians (the Wiener Tonkünstlerverein) for a chamber work featuring a solo wind instrument. Brahms was the Society's President and recommended the Trio (which won third prize) to his publisher Simrock, who took it on under the condition that Zemlinsky also provided a version with violin instead of clarinet. This was a year before Brahms's death, in a decade when he had written four chamber works (a trio, a quintet and two sonatas) with clarinet, and Zemlinsky followed the model of Brahms's Clarinet Trio, which is unmistakable in the style of writing, especially the way in which the clarinet is as eloquent under the texture as on top of it. The first movement is on a large scale, with a monumental exposition and a massive and very Brahmsian piano part supporting a highly Romantic clarinet and cello dialogue that throws its weight into the dramatic coda. There is a pensive piano prelude to the *Andante* taken up by an intimate duet on the clarinet (in A for this movement) and cello, interrupted by a rhapsodic fantasia section before returning to the warmth of D major. The clarinet returns to the B flat instrument for the more lightly scored and dance-like finale, with a broad coda bringing this lovely and career-launching work to a close. In 1938, four years before his death, Zemlinsky started work on a clarinet quartet, but only sketched out about 20 pages.

Beethoven's Septet in E flat Op. 20 for clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello and double bass was included in the composer's first benefit concert at the Hofburg in Vienna in 1800. There is an account of the musicians' poor playing, despite which the event was a success, with Beethoven's first symphony and piano concerto along with the Septet sharing the programme with music by Haydn and Mozart, the whole designed more to show off Beethoven in good company rather than as the man who would change the course of music. Much to his dismay, the Septet was an instant hit and quickly made its way all over Europe; it was the work with which he made his British public debut.

He wrote it around the same time as the Piano Concerto No. 2 and the six String Quartets Op. 18, and it also marked the beginning of his lively relationship with the music publishing world. It is a serenade in six movements, adding a *Tema con variazioni* and a *Scherzo* immediately before the finale. The first movement has a grand slow opening that shows off the virtuoso violin role; the second is a lilting pastoral in the comfort zone of A flat, opening with a lovely clarinet solo; the familiar minuet follows; then a set of a theme with five variations in B flat on a Rhineland song; a *Scherzo* stiffened by horn calls; and a finale with a mock-sad slow introduction, opening into a rondo-style melody treated in crisp sonata-form.

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