

WIGMORE HALL 125

Thursday 22 January 2026
7.30pm



Supported by the Sir Jack Lyons Charitable Trust on the 110th anniversary
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Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky violin

Sergei Bresler violin

Alexander Gordon viola

Kyril Zlotnikov cello

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in B flat Op. 50 No. 1 (1787)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio non lento •

III. Menuetto. Poco allegretto • IV. Finale. Vivace

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

String Quartet No. 1 'The Kreutzer Sonata' (1923)

I. Adagio – Con moto • II. Con moto •

III. Con moto – Vivo – Andante • IV. Con moto – Adagio

Interval

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 13 in B flat Op. 130 with Grosse Fuge Op. 133
(1825-6)

I. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro • II. Presto •

*III. Andante con moto, ma non troppo • IV. Alla danza
tedesca. Allegro assai • V. Cavatina. Adagio molto
espressivo • VI. Finale. Allegro*



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All the quartets in this evening's programme stand out as landmark works in their respective composers' outputs. The experimental character and emotional depth of **Haydn's** Op. 50 quartets set them apart from their more genial and audience-pleasing predecessors – a musical leap forward that is immediately apparent in the opening bars of Op. 50 No. 1. Haydn's rich inventiveness at this stage in his career is manifested in the technique known as monothematicism: practically all the material in the first movement is derived from the basic thematic cell stated at the outset. This technique gives the work a remarkable thematic unity, as well as providing a dazzling display of the many different uses to which a simple motif can be put. The musicologist Charles Rosen devoted several pages of his book *The Classical Style* (1971) to a discussion of the compositional ingenuity of this movement, noting admiringly: 'There are no tunes, few rhythmic surprises, fewer dramatic harmonies. Yet is it fascinating and witty music, in which Haydn, intent on dazzling us with his technique, makes splendid bricks with hardly any straw at all.'

The Op. 50 quartets also differ from the composer's earlier quartets by virtue of their technically demanding cello parts. Until then, the cello had been used mainly to provide a basic harmonic underpinning, and was rarely assigned a more prominent role. The first movement of Op. 50 No. 1 begins innocuously enough, with a two-bar introduction consisting of a single repeated note in the cello, but before long the cellist is expected to scurry around with the same degree of agility as the other players. One of the more florid variations in the slow movement and several passages in the finale also feature an unusually agile cello part. The composer may have created these prominent cello parts to please (or flatter) the patron for whom Op. 50 was written: King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia, a keen amateur cellist. But whatever the reason, the result was a greater equality between the instruments that soon became the norm in Haydn's quartet-writing.

Janáček's String Quartet No. 1 marked an even more notable departure in the Moravian composer's output in that he didn't write it until he was in his late sixties – in stark contrast to Haydn (who had already produced dozens of quartets by the time he reached this age) and Beethoven (who had composed 16 quartets by the time of his death at the age of 56). It belongs to the group of astoundingly original and experimental pieces that Janáček produced during the late flowering of his genius in the 1920s, after his meeting with Kamila Stösslová provided him with a muse who inspired some of his greatest works.

Janáček had already dealt with the topic of the powerful forces unleashed by illicit passion in several previous Kamila-inspired works such as the song cycle *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* (1919) and the

opera *Káťa Kabanová* (1921), and in the quartet he returned to this theme. Its immediate inspiration was a Tolstoy novella that tells the story of a husband who murders his wife after hearing her play Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 9 (the 'Kreutzer') with a man he suspects of being her lover. It's hardly surprising that Janáček, the author of several operas that portray the sufferings of women trapped in humiliatingly subordinate roles, responded to this tale of passion and destructive possessiveness with music of searing power and beauty. His Quartet No. 1 is unashamedly programmatic, and even contains a veiled reference (in the third movement) to the tender second theme from the first movement of Beethoven's sonata. But his message was very different from that of Tolstoy's novella, which was intended as a warning that listening to passionate music could lead those receptive to it astray. Instead, Janáček wanted his music to highlight the catastrophic effects of male despotism.

Each of **Beethoven's** late quartets is in its own way a visionary work that reveals possibilities hitherto undreamt of in the quartet medium. The composer had temporarily abandoned the genre after completing his Op. 95 quartet in F minor in 1810, but by the early 1820s was pondering a return to it, so it was fortuitous that in late 1822 he received a letter from the Russian aristocrat Prince Nikolay Galitzyn asking him for 'one, two or three new quartets'. However, at that time Beethoven was fully occupied with completing several other substantial works, and was in no position to fulfil his new patron's request. He wasn't able to get back into quartet mode until 1825, but then there was no stopping him, and he produced three new works for Prince Galitzyn in quick succession. The B flat quartet – the third of the group in order of composition – was completed in November of that year.

The prospect of a generous payment gave the composer the freedom he needed to create masterpieces that went far beyond the musical boundaries of the time. He no longer felt that he had to confine himself to the four-movement structure that had for long been the standard format in quartet writing, and the number of movements gradually increased, reaching six in Op. 130. This expansion took the quartet form into entirely new territory in terms of length and complexity, leaving critics of the day bewildered by the richness of Beethoven's musical thinking – and especially by the massive *Grosse Fuge* that formed the original finale to the B flat quartet. Only a few months before his death, Beethoven was persuaded to replace the *Grosse Fuge* with a shorter and lighter finale – a substitution that has since given rise to endless debate over which movement makes for a more satisfying conclusion to the work.

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