

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 22 October 2023
7.30pm

Soloists of the Kronberg Academy

Dmytro Udovychenko violin

Hans Christian Aavik violin

Weronika Dziadek viola

Noga Shaham viola

Itai Navon piano

Gary Hoffman cello

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

String Trio in B flat D581 (1817)

I. Allegro moderato • II. Andante •

III. Menuetto. Allegretto • IV. Rondo. Allegretto

Pablo Casals (1876-1973)

Rêverie (1896)

Romanza (1897)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Piano Trio in D minor Op. 120 (1922-3)

I. Allegro, ma non troppo • II. Andantino • III. Allegro vivo

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

String Quintet in F Op. 88 (1882)

I. Allegro non troppo ma con brio

II. Grave ed appassionato - Allegretto vivace

III. Allegro energico - Presto



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Schubert was raised on chamber music. From a very young age, the composer performed works by Mozart and Haydn with his father and brothers, as well as writing his earliest compositions for the Schubert family ensemble. Quartets were their mainstay, as well as works with keyboard. There were also a handful of string trios available to them in Vienna, not least those of Haydn's contemporary Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, yet they remained something of a rarity. Exceptional too would be the genre's appearance in the mature Schubert catalogue. While the String Quartet No. 8 in B flat D112 of September 1814 may well have begun life as a string trio, it was not until September 1816 that the composer returned to the genre proper (D471), only to abandon work halfway through. Finally, a year later, he completed his String Trio in B flat D581.

Although Schubert had wrestled with the material, even providing subsequent revisions to the score, he had created a deftly attractive work, characterised by its lively dialogue and diverse harmonic palette. The constant variation of the motivic upbeat in the first movement, as well as the flowing lines, provides a playfulness that continues in the *Menuetto*. There is a greater sense of hesitation, however, in this dance, which then persists in the solitary trio. The intervening *Andante* is also rather breathless: a lilting sicilienne with a brooding underbelly. But all is balance and charm by the time we reach the finale.

Pablo Casals was no stranger to Schubert's chamber music; at the beginning of the 20th Century, he, Jacques Thibaud and Alfred Cortot made a benchmark recording of Schubert's Piano Trio No. 1 in B flat D898. And it is from the Catalan cellist's own pen that we hear two works for cello and piano: the *Réverie* of 1896 and the *Romanza*, completed the following year. After periods in Brussels and Paris, Casals had returned to Barcelona, where he took up a teaching post and the position of principal cello at the Gran Teatro del Liceo. Yet these contemporaneous songs-without-words appear to hark back to the French capital, not least to the music of Fauré, as well as Casals's many performances at the Folies-Marigny.

It is to **Fauré** proper that the programme then turns, with his Piano Trio in D minor Op. 120, dating from the end of the French composer's life. Long gone were the student years under Saint-Saëns and life as an organist in Rennes and Paris, to say nothing of the disappointing reception of some of his large-scale works – running counter to the embrace of his *mélodies* and the famous *Requiem*. As well as being a prolific composer, Fauré had worked as music critic of *Le Figaro* and taught with great success. By the early 1920s, however, his health was in sharp decline. He was increasingly deaf and sclerotic and was struggling to breathe after years of smoking. Nonetheless, his creative faculties remained intact, evinced by both the Piano Trio and the contemporaneous String Quartet.

Having missed the première of the former in May 1923 due to ill health, Fauré finally heard Casals, Thibaud and Cortot perform the Trio just months before his death. And there is something eerily temporal about the choice of the home key of D minor, as at the opening of the *Requiem*. Here, however, it takes on a more evanescent quality, like an autumn leaf in flight, heard in the opening movement's murmuring accompaniment and song-like phrases. There is contrasting muscularity, too, challenging the mellifluousness of Fauré's melodic gift, though this will be foregrounded in the central *Andantino's* variations on two sweetly sad themes. If the slow movement suggests the melancholy of September, the finale's aestival abundance reminds us that this work was begun during August 1922, in Fauré's favourite retreat of Annecy-le-Vieux. Pitting long string lines against determined Baroque pianism, the rondo fuses those forces with thrilling *legerdemain*.

40 years separate Fauré's Trio from **Brahms's** String Quintet No. 1 in F Op. 88. Completed in another summer retreat – the Austrian spa town of Bad Ischl – in 1882, it contains another double variation form in its central slow movement. But where Fauré's *Andantino* is rooted in embryonic (or incomplete) songs, Brahms's second movement features thematic material from two extant piano works: an 1854 *Sarabande* in the *Grave ed appassionato*; and a *Gavotte* from the same period during the *Allegretto vivace*. The persistent melancholy of the former, as well as its tonal instability, nonetheless reminds us of similarly internalised moments in Brahms's large-scale works.

Muted, too, autumnal even, despite being written a decade before the late chamber music for clarinet, is the tone of the opening movement. It will take on a more public persona, with exuberant dotted rhythms, yet the prominence of the two violas within the texture cannot help but influence the music's hue. That is certainly the case in the second subject. This is couched in A major, thereby providing a tertiary tonal relationship that will, as in Schubert's late String Quintet in C D956, find itself inverted during the recapitulation.

While the lilting, gently bucolic music of the *Allegretto vivace*, as well as its development in the subsequent presto, helps lighten the mood, it is only with the finale that it lifts entirely. This movement's fugal charge has the effect of wiping the slate clean, restoring the tonic – now much more extrovert than when first heard – and even proving rather mischievous during the final stretches. Perhaps, as the old proverb reminds us, it really is darkest just before the dawn.

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