

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 23 April 2024  
7.30pm

Maria Włoszczowska violin  
Tim Crawford violin  
Timothy Ridout viola  
Ting-Ru Lai viola  
Tim Posner cello

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quintet in B flat K174 (1773)  
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio •  
III. Menuetto ma allegretto - Trio •  
IV. Allegro*

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

String Trio Op. 45 (1946)  
*Part 1 - First Episode - Part 2 - Second  
Episode - Part 3*

*Interval*

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Viola Quintet in B minor Op. 115 (1891)  
*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Andantino •  
IV. Con moto*

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**Mozart** wrote the String Quintet in B flat K174 shortly after his 17th birthday in December 1773. The first of six works he wrote in this fledgling genre, it is thought that the work was composed in response to a *Notturmo in C* for the same instrumental combination written by Michael Haydn, who was Joseph's younger brother and Mozart's friend. Mozart was finding his true compositional voice around this time: the motet *Exultate, jubilate* K165 and Symphony No. 25 in G minor K183 are close contemporaries.

The first movement, like much of the quintet, sounds carefree though Mozart's palpable desire to stretch the resources available to him is evident. The opening violin line abruptly meets a *tutti* response, but is thereafter airily expansive before being repeated by the first viola. Throughout, but especially in the development section, solo lines are accompanied by accented comments from the other instruments or passages of dialogue with them. The second movement, played in the key of E flat, has a mellowness of tone that is enhanced by the instruments being muted throughout. Played first in unison, the initial thematic idea subsequently becomes the accompaniment to a melody for the first violin, which eventually the second violin continues. The mood is disturbed by the first viola, which interjects with an emotionally searching solo line which is played beneath a series of strange suspensions in the violins. Thereafter, the main melodic idea from the violins returns. The final two movements evidence stylistic nods to the Haydn brothers. The third movement minuet is playfully Haydnesque with its four-note kernel idea, and the last movement's finale owes a distinct debt with its counterpoint writing for paired instruments. Mozart rejected earlier attempts at these movements and in doing so strengthened the appeal of the work as a whole.

**Schoenberg's** String Trio Op. 45, the last of his chamber music pieces, was written in 1946. Begun three weeks after Schoenberg had suffered a near fatal heart attack, and completed within a month, the novelist Thomas Mann recalled a conversation with the composer: 'He told me about the new Trio he had just completed, and about the experiences he had secretly woven into the composition – experiences of which the work was a kind of fruit. He had even, he said, represented his illness and medical treatment in the music, including even the male nurses and all the other oddities of American hospitals. The work was extremely difficult to play, he said, in fact almost impossible, or at best only for three players of virtuoso rank; but the music was very rewarding because of its extraordinary tonal effects'.

However, it would be a mistake to conceive of the trio as solely concerned with this incident, as material sketched prior to it is also utilised. Whilst on the one hand presenting music of emotional extremes, it is also the most exacting distillation and use of Schoenberg's twelve note row technique.

The single movement is divided into five subsections: three *Parts* and two dividing *Episodes*. *Part 1* and the first *Episode* could be thought of as the movement's exposition; *Part 2* and the second *Episode* as its development section, with *Part 3* concluding the movement. *Part 1* launches headlong into a nightmarish, disorientating vortex. The listener is forcefully subjected to all manner of fragmented ideas and playing techniques. The first *Episode* is its balm, though any melody is slow to register. The approach is reversed in *Part 2* and the second *Episode*: first tranquil, then frenzied. The inner turmoil reaches its peak with the transition to *Part 3*, which concentrates in more than one sense the atmosphere of anguish and consolation, ending finally perhaps on a note of reconciliation.

**Brahms's** Viola Quintet in B minor Op. 115 was originally written as a Clarinet Quintet in the summer of 1891. Months earlier, Brahms was inspired to write his Clarinet Trio in A minor Op. 114 for the soloist Richard Mühlfeld. Upon sending the manuscript, Brahms confessed to 'a far greater piece of foolishness' that was nearing completion. That work was this longer and more substantial quintet. As the viola largely replicates the clarinet's range and can emulate the intended tonal colours, the work has a double life as a viola quintet.

The first movement begins with a beguilingly insinuating theme for the two violins. Brahms so often wrote themes of this type that he referred to them as *unscheinbarket*, or unobtrusive in nature. The thematic seeds that form much of the composition, as well as its mood, are evident within the opening bars. Following the opening theme, a staccato passage of transition builds interest towards the second theme, played by the first viola. This is derived from an element of the opening theme. Both sets of thematic material are then played off against each other.

The second movement is slow and tender. Whilst the first viola spins its effortlessly amorous line, the second viola almost harks back to the opening movement, by playing a passage previously used by the first violin in that movement's second theme. The central section contrasts with its more robust character, which has a central European feel to it. The first viola seemingly improvises its line, whilst the other strings supply muted sad echoes in response.

The third movement is an augmented version of the now familiar thematic material; the various instruments provide high-spirited comments upon it with wit and geniality. The last movement's theme, derived from the opening movement's second theme, is played by the first violin and viola. Five variations ensue: the first four explore different thematic aspects. The last includes a modified version of the work's initial theme, which is then played yet again as a coda.

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