

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 23 February 2025  
7.30pm

This concert is supported by The Marchus Trust

## Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky violin  
Sergei Bresler violin  
Ori Kam viola  
Kyril Zlotnikov cello

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No. 1 in C Op. 49 (1938)

*I. Moderato • II. Moderato • III. Allegro molto •  
IV. Allegro*

String Quartet No. 2 in A Op. 68 (1944)

*I. Overture. Moderato con moto • II. Recitative  
and Romance. Adagio • III. Valse. Allegro •  
IV. Theme and Variations. Adagio*

*Interval*

String Quartet No. 3 in F Op. 73 (1946)

*I. Allegretto • II. Moderato con moto •  
III. Allegro non troppo • IV. Adagio • V. Moderato*



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**Dmitri Shostakovich's** turned to the string quartet relatively late in his career (at the age of 31). The string quartet, with its tradition of introspection and an audience of connoisseurs, seemed to go against the Soviet requirement for 'music of the people'. Shostakovich wrote: 'In composing my First Quartet, I visualised childhood's scenes, somewhat naïve and bright moods associated with spring.'

The first movement sets the scene for the comfortable and light-hearted mood of the quartet, and the easy-going approach extends to the movement's simple structure. A brief development sees the two themes collide, though the laidback *glissando* theme breaks off as the opening returns for the ending section – only for an adapted version to resurface in the closing bars.

The second movement is a theme and variations, with a despondent folk-like theme first presented in the viola. Seven variations follow, with a rough arch shape centred around the fourth variation. This middle variation features agitated triplets across the parts, scattering away from the central theme. The variations that follow retreat and fade to a *morendo* ending.

The short third movement is the only fast one and introduces a mischievous mood that will go onto resurface multiple times across the quartet cycle. It is firmly tongue-in-cheek and creates a tense atmosphere. The movement ends sooner than expected, presenting a tightly-knit dialogue that is left open to interpretation.

The finale plunges back into the spring-like character of the opening, with a joyous first theme. Despite an aggressive development section, the movement concludes in an affirmative C-major. It is intriguing to note that Shostakovich initially wrote the work with this movement and the opening swapped around; the rather more ambiguous ending of the opening was not 'positive' enough to end a work. The decision to end with the Allegro gives the Quartet an energetic and passionate conclusion.

Despite being a wartime work, Shostakovich's Second String Quartet reflects some of the optimism that was returning to Soviet life as victory became clearer, though it remains an enigma. The tone is darker than his First Quartet, made darker still by themes that allude to Klezmer and oom-pah accompaniment figures.

The first movement (titled 'Overture') begins in a declarative A-major flurry. The second theme is hesitant but dominates the central development. With a complex structure of near-symphonic proportions, the movement has a notable darkening of the first theme in its restatement. Soon afterwards, the opening theme is recast as a waltz, in an incongruous combination that is not addressed by the movement's end. The 'recitative and romance' movement forms the emotional backbone for the work. The 'recitative' sections comprise long solos for the first violin, with chromatic lines over the top of haunting chords in the lower three parts. The 'romance' that forms the central section is a pained and twisted version of that genre; the melody here becomes increasingly agitated,

before collapsing into the 'recitative' that opens the movement.

The 'Waltz' third movement presents a distorted dance, taking the second theme from the first movement and recasting it in the grim key of E-flat minor, played by the cello. The theme is then taken up by the upper parts, in a rumination that provides a short sense of relief from the intense tone of the movements that surround it.

The finale is a Theme and Variations, taking its theme from the first movement of Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio. The variations present an audacious tonal scheme which ends in the minor key, despite the major key of the work: a note of pessimism to conclude.

Shostakovich struggled to maintain his rate of production after the war and only completed one work in 1946, his Third Quartet; it was performed but withdrawn soon afterwards. The piece has an air of mystery, of 'something left unsaid', and it is a prime example of Shostakovich's ability to layer multiple possible meanings in the same work.

The first movement opens with a mischievous theme that is subjected to increasingly aggressive interjections. The second theme is more introspective. Complicated counterpoint then begins, with both themes subjected to distortion. The movement ends with a sense of unease that continues throughout the work. A grating viola *ostinato* opens the second movement. We are now in E minor, a distant relation of the work's F major key, further adding to the sense of unease. The movement has a pastoral character, but frequent chromatic interruptions and breaks in texture betray something darker lurking underneath. The key shifts even further for the third movement Allegro: G-sharp minor. With echoes of Bartók's quartets, Shostakovich here presents a biting chord with irregular rhythms in the three lower parts and erratic shifts in pulse to create an uneasy march. After a short development, the opening chords are repeated in F minor, as if being further darkened. In the fourth movement, Shostakovich confronts despair for the first time in his quartets. In *passacaglia* form, with distinct notes of a funeral march, the movement drifts in key before eventually reaching F major. Repetitions slowly lose energy before moving into the finale without a pause.

The finale is a parade of shifting moods; the opening presents a mournful melody over playful accompaniment which becomes brutalised. At the moment of greatest tension, the previous movement's *passacaglia* theme re-emerges, though now presented in overly-aggressive contrast. After a frantic development, the work concludes with three gentle F major chords. According to one performer, Shostakovich attended a rehearsal of the Third Quartet, when 'he sat quite still in silence like a wounded bird, tears streaming down his face'. Just what the significance of this piece was for Shostakovich is impossible to say: the work's emotive power is undeniable, however.

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