

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 23 May 2024
7.30pm

Heath Quartet

Sara Wolstenholme violin
Juliette Roos violin
Gary Pomeroy viola
Christopher Murray 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*

Henriëtte Bosmans (1895-1952)

String Quartet (1927)
*I. Allegro molto moderato • II. Lento • III. Allegro
molto*

Interval

Anatoly Lyadov (1855-1914)

From *Les vendredis* (pub. 1899)
Sarabande • Fugue

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957)

String Quartet No. 3 in D Op. 34 (1944-5)
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Scherzo. Allegro molto •
III. Sostenuto. Like a Folk Tune • IV. Finale.
Allegro*

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Haydn wrote the String Quartet in B flat Op. 50 No. 1, along with the Op. 50 set's five other works, in July 1787 at his publisher's request, to capitalise on the success of the Op. 33 'Russian' quartets. The opening movement draws all of its material from the initial four bars. Repeated notes on the cello precede a cadence that sounds almost like a conclusion. The discord of the interval between E flat and D is used repeatedly within the movement. With injected humour, the cadence sounds dance-like before the recapitulation returns to the discord and is resolved in the coda. The second movement is a theme and three variations in E flat major. The subtlety of construction is notable: listen, for example, to the interplay of the violins in the first variation or how the second variation conflates the theme from six bars to five. Throughout the Op. 50 set, Haydn often created the secondary themes of the movements from material in the primary theme or elsewhere in the quartet in an effort to achieve internal unity. The third movement is a prime example of this: the main theme, which moves from first violin to cello and second violin, is little more than a concentrated chromatic paraphrase of the preceding movement's theme. The trio section at first sounds naïve, but then intensifies before the theme is broken apart. The final movement is a monothematic sonata. After playing with the tempo in short cadenza, the recapitulation is falsely anticipated. A fugal passage precedes the coda, within which the listener is pointed down several blind alleys of structure and musical material.

Henriëtte Bosmans played an important role in Dutch musical life during the first half of the 20th Century. The daughter of the Concertgebouw Orchestra's principal cellist and a piano teacher at the Amsterdam Conservatoire, she established a dual presence as a concert pianist and the most important Dutch female composer of her time. Her early compositions were influenced by German Romanticism after studying under Cornelis Dopper. Later studies with Willem Pijper lent her writing greater concision and a more modernist tone. The String Quartet, written shortly after she began studying with Pijper in 1927, is dedicated to him and evidences the birth of this new stylistic direction. The opening movement begins with a lyrical unison motif, which is succeeded by music of poignant vibrancy. Listeners may find echoes of Debussy or Ravel in the writing, yet there is also a parallel with Janáček's quartets in the dialogue between the instruments. The middle movement is introspective and otherworldly; a cello solo establishes itself with the violins above it. The final movement is characterised by its constant rhythmic driving force and its strong theme. The middle section finds this softening almost into a waltz, before the earlier strong motif returns in conclusion.

Millionaire timber merchant and amateur violist Mitrofan Belyayev promoted the string quartet in St Petersburg between the 1880s and early 1900s. Friday

evenings at his mansion were dedicated to performances of works by Beethoven, Mozart and Schubert or Onslow, Raff and Dittersdorf; the soirees were accompanied by sumptuous dinners. New works by Rimsky-Korsakov and his pupils including Lyadov and Glazunov were also presented. Often these works, some written as multi-composer collaborations, were so new that the ink was still drying as the piece was played. In 1899, 16 single-movement miniatures representative of these weekly gatherings were selected and collectively published as *Les vendredis*. Arguably best remembered as a composer of piano miniatures, **Lyadov's** *Sarabande* utilises his canonic writing skills. The *Fugue*, played first on muted strings, rises to a crescendo and then fades away wistfully. Both pieces are notable for their harmonic colouring.

Korngold's child prodigy status was recognised by Richard Strauss and Mahler, which led to early operatic successes as a composer. Upon moving to Hollywood in 1934, he focused on film scores for Warner Bros. After the Anschluss in March 1938, Korngold became a refugee, and this brought on a deepening depression. His final chamber music composition, the String Quartet No. 3 in D Op. 34, written in 1944-5, was the first work he had written 'for himself' since 1937. The quartet's initial sketches were presented to his wife, Luzi, as a Christmas present in 1944. Korngold's Hollywood neighbour, the conductor Bruno Walter, was the work's dedicatee. For the first time Korngold re-used themes from film scores, which was allowed under his studio contract.

The opening movement is in sonata form. The two themes almost mirror each other; one descends whilst the other ascends, albeit with measured hesitation. The beginning sounds somewhat mystifying, but it becomes progressively more resolute. Korngold's score markings reflect this: he writes 'Avanti!' above a sequence of increasingly bold octave leaps to spur the players on. The movement's dissonant elements are resolved at its conclusion. The second movement is written in ternary form. From the start considerable technical demands are made upon the players through the ostentatious writing. The central trio section includes a reworked melodic idea from the score for the film *Between Two Worlds*, which had been completed just ahead of this quartet. Film music also shapes the slow third movement. The love theme from *The Sea Wolf*, written in 1941, is stated and then used as the basis for variations. The final movement is initially lively before turning to a more jovial mood. The light-hearted second theme from this movement would be reused in 1946 in his score for *Devotion*, a film about the Brontë sisters. The opening movement's downward theme is recalled before the quartet concludes in an unabashed upbeat manner.

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