WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 23 September 2026
7.30pm

Danish String Quartet
- **Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen** violin
- **Frederik Øland Olsen** violin
- **Asbjørn Nørgaard** viola
- **Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin** cello

Johannes Rostamo cello

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)	String Quintet in C D956 (1828) *I. Allegro ma non troppo* *II. Adagio* *III. Scherzo. Presto – Trio. Andante sostenuto* *IV. Allegretto*
	Interval
Thomas Adès (b.1971)	Wreath – for Franz Schubert (2024) *UK première*
Franz Schubert	Die Nebensonnen from *Winterreise* D911 (1827) *arranged by Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen*

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Wreath – for Franz Schubert is a single-movement work for string quintet. The central string trio of violin, viola and cello play arco throughout, a gradually unfolding 'lifespan' of entwined 'blooms'. The outer violin and cello outline them in pizzicato. The players are loosely co-ordinated, but within specific boundaries, so that within certain limits no two performances would be the same, and the duration is flexible: between 15 and 30 minutes, depending on the players, or maybe the weather.

The inescapable relation to Schubert's double-cello quintet will be clear, especially to its slow movement. At a recent (devastating) performance of it I was fascinated over again by the role of the second cello – at once lead singer, commentator and umpire.

I am most grateful to the great Danish String Quartet for giving me the time and encouragement to realize and develop this new path in my work.

© Thomas Adès

As the Viennese autumn of 1828 set in, **Franz Schubert** sent a selection of recently completed works to one of his more receptive publishers, HA Probst of Leipzig. In the accompanying letter he left mention of his String Quintet until last, asking the publisher to let him know if 'by chance' any of the works appealed. As Schubert had probably feared, Probst politely declined all the works submitted, but invited the composer to send in some songs and piano trifles instead.

By the time autumn was turning to winter, Schubert was dead, aged 31. His Quintet remained unpublished for another 25 years. It would be quite wrong to imagine that he died in obscurity – he was much admired as a songwriter, and arrangements of his lighter instrumental music could be heard at the bandstands in Vienna's parks. But his attempts to be taken seriously as a composer of profound, large-scale works – to stand comparison with his idol, Beethoven – remained thwarted.

Posterity belatedly gave Schubert's masterpieces the respect they deserved. The String Quintet is revered as an unsurpassed achievement in chamber music, a 50-minute emotional journey that leaves few listeners unaffected. The spiritual realms it takes us to have inevitably prompted speculation that Schubert was contemplating his imminent death. His fluctuating health at the time meant that he was certainly aware of the possibility, but he remained eager to grasp any hope of recovery.

In more technical terms, the Quintet is extraordinarily innovative. For a start, Schubert chooses to add a second cello to the standard quartet line-up, rather than the extra viola favoured by Mozart and Beethoven. The tempo indication of the first movement translates as 'quick, but not too quick' – yet this registers as some of the slowest 'quick' music ever written. Whereas Beethoven was always keen to move his harmonies forward, even in his slow movements, here Schubert lets them linger. For the first six bars the bass note doesn't change. Early on, a repertoire of devices – fanfares, arpeggios, repeated quavers on a monotone – is established to keep the pulse active while the chords stretch out like a flat horizon.

All this is taken to an even further extreme in the *Adagio*, in the outer sections of which time seems suspended. Yet in the central section the dead calm becomes a tempest; the root note and fifth of E major move up a semitone to wrench us into F minor and a world of pain. When the quietude returns it retains vestigial traces of what we have been through, and a feint to F minor just before the end brings an unmistakable chill of recollection.

The *Scherzo* that follows, with its hunting calls and stabbing accents, has a manic quality, and the desperate nature of its rejoicing is exposed by the drooping phrases and ghostly stasis of the *Trio* section. The finale has a dance rhythm and a more convincing sense of purpose but, despite the C major key signature, it starts in the minor, and the bass line is stuck on C for 12 bars. Towards the end the quickening tempo suggests panic, and an obstinate D flat before the final C shows that danger remains near. A semitone, the shortest possible gap between notes in the Western musical scale – and, throughout this work, the brief distance between peace and pain, oblivion and eternity.

Schubert set the first 12 numbers of his song cycle *Winterreise* (A Winter's Journey) early in 1827, believing that these poems by Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827) comprised the author's complete work. But later in the year he discovered, and set, 12 more.

The narrative of the cycle is told by a young man whose beloved has left him for another. He embarks on a trek through a winter landscape, with death gradually becoming more desired than life, and his mind increasingly estranged from reality. In Schubert's ordering, 'Die Nebensonnen' (The Companion Suns) is the penultimate song. The poet believes he sees three suns in the sky. Once, he tells us, he had three suns of his own; two have set (perhaps they symbolise the eyes of his loved one); he wishes for the third to be extinguished, and for darkness to descend.

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