

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 25 February 2023  
7.30pm

## Quatuor Ebène

Pierre Colombet violin  
Gabriel Le Magadure violin  
Marie Chilleme viola  
Raphaël Merlin cello

Richard Dubugnon (b.1968) Secular Suite for string quartet based on works by JS Bach (2016)  
*I. Choral 'Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern'*  
*II. Sinfonia 'Gleich wie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt'*  
*III. Recitativo*  
*IV. Aria 'Schafe können sicher weiden'*  
*V. An Wasserflüssen Babylons*  
*VI. Choral 'Christe, der du bist Tag und Licht'*  
*VII. Präludium*  
*VIII. Fuga 'B.A.C.H.'*  
*IX. Choral 'Die Nacht ist kommen'*

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) String Quartet in F (1902-3)  
*I. Allegro moderato, très doux • II. Assez vif, très rythmé •*  
*III. Très lent • IV. Vif et agité*

Interval

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) String Quartet in A Op. 41 No. 3 (1842)  
*I. Andante espressivo - Allegro molto moderato •*  
*II. Assai agitato • III. Adagio molto •*  
*IV. Finale. Allegro molto vivace*

CLASSIC *fm* Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

### Friends of Wigmore Hall – celebrating 30 years of friendship

Over the past 30 years, Friends have been providing transformational support for the Hall, ensuring this historic building remains a home for great music making. Enjoy the benefits of friendship by joining as a Friend today, and be a part of the Wigmore story. Visit: [wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends) | Call: 020 7258 8230

FRIENDS OF  
WIGMORE HALL

30

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.

In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.

Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838  
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://Wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG  
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Born in Lausanne, **Richard Dubugnon** writes music in which old tools – tonality, metrical rhythm, developing form – are used in a sophisticated way to new ends, sometimes with reference to works or styles of the past. In his *Secular Suite* (2016) the references have taken over, for the piece is made of movements by JS Bach (or associated with him), Dubugnon's contribution being limited to scoring the music for string quartet, prescribing tempos and dynamics, in some cases changing the key, and very occasionally moving the music to a different octave. His intervention is, however, determinative. Out of miscellaneous pieces, some very familiar, comes a string quartet in B flat that speaks, through this ancient music, with a modern voice. The suite is secular in that music written for church use is reconvened for a quartet recital, but the original aura is not lost.

A chorale is followed by the sinfonia and opening recitative from a church cantata, the viola taking the vocal line, as it does in the ensuing aria: 'Sheep may safely graze'. Next come a grand chorale prelude and a second chorale, played pizzicato. Dubugnon then inserts a work that, though it has a BWV number, is not by Bach: a prelude and fugue on his name dating from later in the 18th Century. The suite ends with another chorale, on muted strings. The words are muted, too, of course, but relevant: 'The night is coming in which we should rest.'

**Ravel** was near the end of his long and unsatisfactory time at the Paris Conservatoire when he completed his String Quartet in F. On 5 March 1904 it had its first performance, with Debussy in the audience, approving – as well he might, given that the quartet was partly a homage, if also partly a farewell.

Debussian features, drawn largely from the senior composer's quartet of a decade before, include proximity to the old modes of folksong and chant, thematic cross-references between movements (i.e. cyclic form, inherited from Franck), use of pizzicato at the start of the scherzo (played second, as in the Debussy) and, of course, much other savouring of colour. Right from the start, though, we are in Ravel's world, wistful and exquisite.

The work opens with a purely diatonic phrase that opens the door into a world of much richer harmonic enchantment, and that proves malleable enough to produce a great many variants, soon afterwards and in successive movements. Its presence can be felt, for instance, behind the second subject, a longer melody launched by a dreamy rising fifth and presented by the first violin followed by the second. There is a development section and a subtly altered recapitulation.

After its pizzicato introduction – perhaps Spanish, never quite forgotten – the scherzo works with a theme in A, taken over from the first violin by the viola, before decelerating into a slow middle section, played with mutes and casting an eye in the direction of the waltz. A modified reprise completes the movement.

The viola offers a reminiscence of the work's beginning and thereby initiates a slow movement, in G flat and again muted, that has a lot to do with memory. A more direct quotation from the first movement comes from the first violin as even flow is established after the hesitant introduction. An atmosphere of reverie continues, however, until broken by the cello, mutes now dispatched. Eventually the second violin brings in a new theme, still with reference back to the first movement, and the movement touches a moment of passion before working back to a reprise.

The finale, while restoring F major, begins with much more agitated music than we have heard so far. This gives way to more variants of ideas from the first movement, after which the two kinds of music – dynamic and lyrical, new and old – are joined like two hands linking, and remain joined into a brilliant coda.

Shadows of the past turn to light in the last of the three quartets **Robert Schumann** composed inside 19 days: June 4-22, 1842. As preparation, he had made a thorough study of the quartets of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and of his friend Mendelssohn. When all was done, Mendelssohn's admiration was the ultimate seal of approval, and it was to Mendelssohn that Schumann dedicated the works.

His own ideal was that quartet texture had to be, as he wrote, 'beautiful and even abstrusely woven conversation among four people'. He was concerned, too, as in the symphonies he had begun writing just before, to increase the continuity and wholeness of a four-movement composition – and even of an entire set of works. This third quartet begins with a few bars that seem to be searching for a way to continue a story that had started in the first. The search, however, has already come up with the answer, in its motif of a falling fifth followed by an ornamented further fall, and this motif, gently corrected into clear A major, forms the first theme of a sonata allegro; the second subject is melody streaming on lively syncopation. There is a short development of the first theme, which is abbreviated in the recapitulation so that it can be restored in the coda.

Instead of a scherzo, the work proceeds to a set of variations in the relative minor. Features of the first movement maintain connection: syncopation and the fifth, now rising to kick off a vigorous round as second variation. The slow third variation provides a middle section, followed by the fourth and a coda.

Next comes a slow movement in D, rich and serene – until the viola, alone, sounds a niggle. The upshot is a troubling heartbeat in the second violin, which cannot be soothed. We expect resolution, and we get it, but along with continuing anxiety.

The rondo *Finale* sets out from a chord that reminds us where this quartet started out. But back in A major, and through a 'Quasi Trio' gavotte that appears twice, the music bounds confidently to a conclusion.

© Paul Griffiths 2023

*Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.*