

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 25 February 2025  
7.30pm

Timothy Ridout viola

12 Ensemble

Eloisa-Fleur Thom violin I

Zahra Benyounes violin I

Venetia Jollands violin I

Tanja Roos violin I

Oliver Cave violin II

Ellie Consta violin II

Maria Gilicel violin II

Luba Tunnicliffe viola

Matthew Kettle viola

Dominic Stokes viola

Max Ruisi cello

Sergio Serra cello

Colin Alexander cello

Toby Hughes double bass

Gabriel Abad Varela double bass

Please refrain from applause until Oliver Coates's 'One Without' has ended

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Komm, süßer Tod, komm selge Ruh BWV478

*arranged by Max Ruisi*

Tom Coult (b.1988)

Prelude (after Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe)

*UK première*

Oliver Coates (b.1982)

One Without

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Lachrymae Op. 48a for solo viola and strings

*Interval*

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

String Quartet in C minor Op. 51 No. 1 (c. 1865-73)

*arranged by Max Ruisi*

*I. Allegro • II. Romanze. Poco adagio •*

*III. Allegretto molto moderato e comodo •*

*IV. Allegro*



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**J.S. Bach's** 'Komm, süßer Tod' ('Come, sweet Death') is a song for voice and *basso continuo*, in a simple verse form, that was published in the *Musicalisches Gesang-Buch* of Georg Christian Schemelli in 1736. Though the original sentiment of the words is rather sepulchral, its melody has inspired instrumental versions by various figures, including Max Reger and Leopold Stokowski. With Bach's more elaborate tendencies suspended, the devotional simplicity of this song is well suited to the expressive qualities of strings, as we'll hear tonight in Max Ruisi's arrangement.

For composer **Tom Coult**, early string music has become frequent point of departure, having orchestrated works by Tartini, Vivaldi and Biber for the violinist Daniel Pioro and the BBC Philharmonic. His Prelude (after Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe) reworks a movement from Saint-Colombe's Viol Suite in E minor, setting it for a string orchestra without violins. As he describes it, 'the sparser lines of the solo viol are refracted into a deep, rich ensemble – implied harmonies made audible, new ones added, everything getting generally thicker and creamier'. At the same time, he has tried to maintain a sense of the 'liquid freedom' that is idiomatic to the world of the 17th-century French composer, and which can 'lift music of this period off the page'.

**Oliver Coates** is a cellist and composer who writes and records for TV and film. *One Without* forms part of his soundtrack to Charlotte Wells's critically-acclaimed *Aftersun* (2022), a subtle and affecting film about a father-daughter relationship remembered at 20 years's distance. Coates intended the score to evoke 'the vivid glow of memory', and *One Without* underscores the crucial final scene and credits. Its softly repeating sequence – with harmonies slightly blurred and a warm tone – is in keeping with the movie's understated ambiguity. Its fragmentary nature suggests a yearning for completion, but also the enduring comfort of a memento.

Though the piano was his main instrument, **Benjamin Britten** understood well the qualities and capabilities of the viola, having learned to play it as a child. His *Lachrymae*, in its original version for viola and piano, was composed in 1950 for the violist William Primrose. But in 1976, at the suggestion of another violist – Cecil Aronowitz – Britten re-arranged the accompaniment for strings. Sadly, by this stage his health was in decline, and he died before he could hear the new version performed at the Aldeburgh Festival the following year.

Subtitled 'Reflections on a song of John Dowland', *Lachrymae* takes as its starting point the lute song 'If my complaints could passions move'. Britten was no stranger to early English music: in 1945, he had written variations and fugue on a theme by Purcell for *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. But *Lachrymae* occupies a more inward space than that public-spirited work, as Britten draws Dowland's melancholia into his own modern idiom.

For much of the piece, an eerie quietness reigns. At the opening, a three-note rising arpeggio from the viola

foreshadows the first line of the song, which is softly intoned by double bass and cello. The series of 'reflections' that follow are closely based on this material, while around halfway through the soloist quotes part of Dowland's 'Flow my Tears – the original Lachrymae'. But towards the end, after building to an expressive climax, Britten conjures a magical transformation: Dowland's original part-writing emerges, like an Elizabethan ghost stepping out of a wall, and brings the piece to a serene conclusion.

**Brahms's** String Quartet in C minor was the first of two he published together as his Op. 51 in 1873, when he was 40 years old. His friend Alwin Cranz claimed that the composer had destroyed more than 20 quartets before this point – perhaps an exaggeration, but nonetheless revealing of his intensely self-critical nature. Correspondence with his publisher Fritz Simrock and the violinist Joseph Joachim in the preceding years suggest an impatient desire for the composer to complete a quartet he was happy with.

We do not know exactly when he began work on the Op. 51 quartets, but when completed Brahms noted that they were written 'for the second time'. As with his first symphony of 1876, he may have felt daunted by a form that was so overshadowed by Beethoven (and that symphony would also be in C minor, a strongly Beethovenian key). Certainly, the quartet's outer movements suggest a composer determined to prove himself. Both have a furious energy: urgent dotted rhythms, bounding leaps, intensively worked material. Textures are predominantly full, with relatively few rests. When the first movement eventually loses steam and resolves quietly in the major mode, it is only a temporary respite from a struggle that will be resumed in the finale.

The middle two movements, meanwhile, could scarcely be more different. The second, a 'Romanze', turns the pervasive dotted rhythm into a gentle, song-like melody. But the overall tone is reserved, at times quasi-nocturnal, and not as outwardly heartfelt as the title suggests. The intermezzo-like third movement, scored with the direction *comodo* ('comfortable'), has a main theme with an ambling charm, and a central section marked by a colourful effect called *bariolage*, in which alternating strings are played for the same pitch. The feeling throughout is pleasantly domestic.

But with an arresting unison line – recalling the dotted rhythm and contour of the work's opening salvo – the finale throws us back into a maelstrom. Though the writing here is equally intensive as the first movement, the form is necessarily more condensed. And when the final bars accelerate us towards a breathless finish, this time it is firmly stamped with the furrowed brow of the minor mode.

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