

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 25 November 2024
7.30pm

Quatuor Danel

Marc Danel violin
Gilles Millet violin
Vlad Bogdanas viola
Yovan Markovitch cello

François-Frédéric Guy piano

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No. 10 in A flat Op. 118 (1964)
*I. Andante con moto • II. Allegretto furioso •
III. Adagio • IV. Allegretto - Andante*

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996)

String Quartet No. 11 Op. 89 (1965-6)
*I. Allegro assai • II. Allegretto • III. Adagio
semplice • IV. Allegro leggiero*

Interval

Mieczysław Weinberg

Piano Quintet Op. 18 (1944)
*I. Moderato con moto • II. Allegretto • III. Presto •
IV. Largo • V. Allegro agitato*

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Shostakovich wrote his Tenth Quartet in just eleven days in July 1964, only six weeks after finishing the Ninth. Fitting for this double-cycle, it is dedicated to Weinberg; Shostakovich had set himself the challenge of 'catching up' with Weinberg in their quartet competition, and he overtook him with this work. Shostakovich wrote: 'in celebration of this achievement, [we] had a good old booze up. Today I feel dreadful and disgusting'.

The work opens with an altered sonata form, manipulating the 'classical' traditions of the quartet genre (combined with the four movements in this work, the last of Shostakovich's quartets to take the 'traditional' number). Despite the work's labelling of A flat major, the first movement frequently slips to distantly related minor keys; the overall effect is a sense of the scale being somehow 'more minor than minor' – a feeling that only accelerates over the work.

The second movement is labelled 'furioso', the only time such a marking appears in Shostakovich's cycle. It presents an outburst of anger in an E minor scherzo, and can be compared to the second movement of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony. The third movement presents a slow passacaglia set of variations, opening with chorale-like lines in the inner parts and the cello giving a heavily chromatic theme.

As in quartets Three through to Six, the finale of the Tenth dominates the work. It presents a complex exploration of a tight-knit group of chromatic themes in a structure that expands from the rondo-sonata classical tradition of restating themes in a particular order. In Shostakovich's case, the central section of this movement takes the 'development' character of traditional sonata and sits within the chaotic mood for an uncomfortably long period of time, ratcheting up the tension. To conclude, the opening themes are given in reverse order, fading away to a quiet ending.

Weinberg's Eleventh Quartet followed hot on the heels of Shostakovich's Tenth. The work's dedication to Weinberg's first daughter, Victoria, is appropriate, as it is often child-like yet emotively powerful. Study of the composer's manuscripts reveals that an entire second movement was replaced; Weinberg revised it in 1966 when preparing for its première, a year after the first draft.

The opening movement takes an F major adapted sonata form. The development central section is greatly expanded, introducing new themes over a duration more than double that of the first section. When the opening returns, the themes are cast in 'darkened' versions, combined with some of the materials given in the development. The result is an unsettling introduction to the work. The second movement as we know it is relatively short, at only three minutes in performance (it would be even shorter, were it not for a repeat that restates the whole movement). Despite its brevity, the material of the movement falls into two distinct sections, perhaps best described as a minuet and trio. The slow and meditative third movement signals a turning in the character of the Eleventh Quartet. There are four cycles of ensemble-

playing leading to a solo, in which each player has a focus, either leading the return of the opening material, or through the extended solo that follows. This creates a democratic approach in terms of performance, but also suggests an atmosphere of unity which, when coupled with the melancholic character, evokes imagery of a group united by grief.

The quartet ends with a curious final movement that begins subdued and then unfolds into a gallop but runs out of steam before closure is found. This finale is played entirely with mutes and has a dynamic level that never reaches beyond *mp*. Hopes of questions being addressed are dashed at the last minute, following the promise of building towards a triumphant conclusion.

Weinberg's Piano Quintet is a youthful but formidable work. Whereas Shostakovich's celebrated Quintet is often contemplative in character, Weinberg's is more extroverted. The piano part is particularly demanding, with several extended solos; a remarkable recording exists of Weinberg performing the piece with the Borodin Quartet, testament to his own pianistic proficiency.

The Quintet begins with an austere phrase that establishes the tone for both the first movement and the entire piece. The quartet responds with punctuating gestures that complement the piano's bolder thematic statements. In the second theme, a dotted rhythm allows the strings to briefly take centre stage, before the opening theme returns with a powerful restatement. In the second movement, a slow theme in the strings alternates with a lively, triplet-rich piano solo. The triplets are quickly expanded across the ensemble, then fade into a macabre mood, as the strings play eerie passages with the back of the bow.

The third movement opens with muted flurries in the strings and high-octave lines in the piano, as if suspended. This is soon broken by piano *glissandi* and trills from the strings, leading into a central dance section. Hints of klezmer scales and a Chopin-inspired solo passage add to the cabaret atmosphere.

The *Largo* brings a sombre shift, countering the prior exuberance with a severe character. It begins with a solemn line of octaves. The first violin takes a mournful solo, followed by a burst of major tonality from the piano. Momentum builds, culminating in an intense and passionate outpouring. The theme returns to the piano before dying away to a gentle close.

The finale opens with mechanical pulsating rhythms and assertive piano interjections. A surprising second theme introduces a major-key folk-like dance. The piano counters with jazz-like chords, and the first violin reintroduces the theme from the opening movement, uniting the piece. This unsettling combination of themes intensifies, leading to a fiery reprise of the opening movement's theme. Finally, the energy gradually subsides, bringing the work to a gentle, major-key conclusion.

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