

# WIGMORE HALL

Friday 27 June 2025  
7.00pm

## Quatuor Danel

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

## Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996)

### String Quartet No. 16 Op. 130 (1981)

*I. Allegro • II. Allegro – Andantino •  
III. Lento • IV. Moderato*

### String Quartet No. 17 Op. 146 (1986)

*I. Allegro • II. Andantino •  
III. Lento • IV. Allegro*

## Interval

## Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

### String Quartet No. 15 in E flat minor Op. 144 (1974)

*I. Elegy. Adagio • II. Serenade. Adagio •  
III. Intermezzo. Adagio • IV. Nocturne. Adagio •  
V. Funeral march. Adagio molto • VI. Epilogue. Adagio*



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**Weinberg** dedicated his Sixteenth Quartet (1981) to his sister, Ester, who would have turned 60 that year (along with his parents, she was murdered in the Holocaust). The quartet continues Weinberg's reengagement with Bartók, now combined with Jewish themes. The work opens with a striking violin passage, while the lower parts give a recurring chorale-like accompaniment. The viola gives the second theme, with emphasised minor inflections. The development creates a dark sense of tension that lingers into the recapitulation. Even towards the movement's close, 'darkened' versions of both themes provide a fractured sense of unease.

The second movement presents a contorted scherzo and trio, with clear nods to Bartók. The scherzo consists of staggered entries evoking a clockwork mechanism. Towards the scherzo's close, the first violin gives a contrasting lyrical theme with short-long rhythms. The trio section is restrained by comparison. A ghost-like quality is sustained by an unusually wispy articulation – *sul tasto, senza vibrato*. The scherzo repeat interrupts this moment of relative tranquillity, reintroducing the clock-like ticking from the movement's opening.

The third movement opens with a mournful violin line; the cello enters in a fugato-like texture, before the remaining two parts join them. A brief climax is reached before the procedure is repeated, with the first violin and cello starting once more. A sombre sense of moral outrage is suggested during the movement, only to ebb away towards its close.

The finale provides an ambivalent conclusion and brings Jewish thematic elements to the centre of attention. It opens with a sprightly waltz, together with an 'oom-pah-pah' accompaniment. The waltz theme reaches a screaming climax before the cello harks back to the second movement's short-long rhythms. The texture subsides to leave just the first violin – harking back to the beginning of the piece. A series of slow alternating chords brings the work to a gentle yet uneasy close.

Weinberg's final quartet (1986) takes a surprisingly light-hearted mood, something that may have come from his reengagement with his very earliest works, including revising the scores of his First and Second Quartets. The Seventeenth also continues his practice of self-quotation, most notably in one of the most important themes in this single-movement work: the second theme of the first section, a chorale-like gesture that was also heard in his opera *The Portrait*, used there to represent the nobility of the artist and the integrity of artistic endeavour. The Seventeenth Quartet is set in one movement and features an array of self-quotations; in contrast to Shostakovich's practice, where quotations create a tapestry of meanings, Weinberg's use seems to have been more of a pool of melodies that he could dip into (the composer himself referred to his music as a kind of 'cooking pot' of melodies and themes).

The opening section brings a cheeky D major melody that quickly slips into more distantly-related chords; the

*Portrait* chorale theme then answers. The central section of the work then moves into minor keys in an *adagio* slow section, interrupted by a faster *andantino* in B flat minor. After a return of the *adagio*, there is a purposefully clumsy recapitulation to bring us back to the opening melody after this extended dialogue: by this point, it is revealed that the overall structure of the work has been the textbook-like sonata form all along, even with significant distortions for expressive effects. The work comes to a wistful and gentle close on warm D major chords. Despite being written towards the end of his life, the Seventeenth Quartet is almost bursting with humour and charm; it is certainly a fitting conclusion to his quartet cycle. Weinberg's late biographer, Per Skans, expressed it best: 'in the joyful final bars we recognize the knowing smile of the young conductor at the Jewish Theatre in Warsaw'.

By 1974, **Shostakovich** was increasingly frail, reflected in a string of late works that all ruminate on the theme of death, including his Fifteenth Quartet. It is a remarkable piece: six slow movements, all in E flat minor. As an essay on mortality and existence itself, it is near relentless in its intensity.

Shostakovich told the Beethoven Quartet to play the first movement, *Elegy*, 'so that flies drop in mid-air, and the audience start leaving the hall from sheer boredom'. The parts enter in a slow fugato-like texture in one of the longest stretches of diatonic writing in his quartets, with the first 48 bars containing only the pitches of the E flat minor scale. The movement has an oppressive stillness, with little goal-directed motion. This is shattered by the ironically-titled *Serenade* second movement, with scream-like gestures soon followed by jarring clusters that swell in dynamic. After 12 of these 'scream' gestures, the music descends into a macabre waltz. This moves into the *Intermezzo* movement, another ironic title. Here, a low pedal note is sustained under a virtuosic violin solo with quotes from Bach and Shostakovich's opera *The Nose*.

The *Nocturne* fourth movement is built from a lethargically-slowed dotted rhythm, heard so many times across the quartet cycle. The fifth movement is the slowest of all, titled *Funeral march*. Here, the viola leads the emotional heart of the work. There is little sense of climax or build-up; instead, tension and energy subside to give way into the final movement. This *Epilogue* is based primarily on the final eight bars of the first movement but now recast into the funeral march, interwoven with themes from the preceding movements. In the final recollection, the music fades away with a viola solo.

The Fifteenth Quartet is simultaneously one of the bleakest but also one of the most powerful statements in the string quartet repertoire. Fyodor Druzhinin, violist of the Beethoven Quartet, said it had a 'shattering effect on all who heard it', something that rings true today.

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