

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 28 April 2022 7.30pm

## Schumann Quartet

Erik Schumann violin

Ken Schumann violin

Veit Benedikt Hertenstein viola

Mark Schumann cello

CLASSIC *f*M

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**Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809)

String Quartet in C Op. 33 No. 3 'The Bird' (1781)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Scherzo. Allegretto •  
III. Adagio ma non troppo • IV. Rondo. Presto*

**Helena Winkelman** (b.1974)

Papa Haydn's Parrot (2016)

*I. A Question of Character • II. Menuet in Slow Motion •  
III. Memory of a Dance • IV. At Ease (Adagio) •  
V. Non Perpetuum Mobile • VI. Variations on Very Little •  
VII. Rondo In Presence of Fleas • VIII. Haydn On The Rocks*

Interval

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791)

String Quartet No. 17 in B flat K458 'The Hunt' (1784)

*I. Allegro vivace assai • II. Menuetto. Moderato •  
III. Adagio • IV. Allegro assai*

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In letters he sent out in December 1781 to potential subscribers, **Haydn** said that the new quartets he was offering, soon to be published as his Op. 33, had been composed in 'a new and special way'. This was more than marketing. By 1781, when he wrote these works, Haydn had let almost a decade pass since his last set, and there was indeed something new in how the four instruments now responded to one another as conversational partners.

The collection's C major piece is a case in point, with at least one of the partners very often avian; hence the nickname. But Haydn plays other tricks too. The very opening has the first violin skidding down to complete a phrase in C, which, after an expectant halt, is repeated up a step, in D minor. We have not moved, but the air is different. Ventures into the minor continue; meanwhile, birdlike chirps increase. A folksy tune rounds off the exposition, which is followed by the usual phases of development (towards the end of which the chirps become serious), recapitulation and (brief) coda.

Op. 33 was noted at the time for Haydn's replacement of the minuet with a scherzo, but that of this C major work is no joke, being more a kind of hymn, with everyone in a low register and, to begin with, *sotto voce*. The trio, for the violins alone, has more twittering.

In F, the slow movement is in sonata form, again with plaintive turns into the minor mode. Here the birds are silent, listening. They are back in the finale, as are the merrymaking peasants.

Herself a violinist and quartet player, **Helena Winkelmann** composed *Papa Haydn's Parrot* in 2016 for the Schumann Quartet. Haydn did indeed possess a parrot, an African Grey, which he bought on one of his London trips. However, the birds that sing and frolic here are, much more, those of the quartet we have just heard.

The birds and the folk music of Haydn's first movement are there in Winkelmann's, allowing for almost two and a half centuries of change in what we mean by wit and classicism. Next comes a distanced re-hearing of Haydn's minuet, played very slowly and in natural harmonics (requiring a retuning of the G string to A on the part of the first violin). With a nod to her native Switzerland, the composer suggests we might be hearing alphorns from over the mountains. The third movement takes off from the trio, the fourth from the slow movement, its harmonies placed on a slippery microtonal slope. There is then another skewed replay of Haydn's opener, in the same number of bars and with Haydn's parrot taking part, on first violin. Movement six goes back to the slow movement again, seven to the finale, with other animal additions. This is followed by another finale, for which Winkelmann's instruction is: 'Think BIG BAND!'

Rarely at a loss for notes, **Mozart** was evidently stunned by the appearance of Haydn's Op. 33 string quartets. The challenge

became a model for the set of quartets he dedicated to the senior composer – a remarkable departure from the convention by which published works were inscribed to noble patrons in token of gratitude and hope of future favour. 'Long and laborious study', he noted in his dedication, had been required to create these compositions.

They came in two batches: a first set of three composed between late in 1782 and the early summer of 1783, and – after work on two comic operas that stalled at an early stage – a second set in the autumn and winter of 1784-5. Copies of this second clutch he sent back to his father in Salzburg, and Leopold wrote approvingly that they were 'indeed a bit lighter, but excellently composed'. Tonight's quartet in B flat was the first of this later group, completed on 9 November 1784. Since Mozart published them in order of composition, it took fourth place in the edition that came out the following year.

It gained its nickname on account of the cantering 6/8 metre of the first movement and the triadic themes, evocative of the hunting horn. Pretty soon in this opening *Allegro*, though, the music is straying into more shadowy, minor-mode territory; an abbreviated trill motif, offered by the second violin back at the close of the second phrase, becomes an obsession, inspected by each of the players in a game of solos. Soon after this, the trill shows it can take on an upward move, and in this form it occupies a fair bit of the development. First, though, a deficiency has to be made up for. The exposition somehow bounced along without recalling its duty to come up with a settled second subject in the dominant key, F major. This duly arrives at the start of the development. Recapitulation and coda properly complete the movement.

One innovation of Haydn's that Mozart did not take up, perhaps out of respect, was that of using the title 'scherzo' for the fast inner movement. The minuet he wrote for this quartet is at once robust and delicate, balanced and irregular (short-long phrasing in the first section). Its trio is mostly soft and smooth – except that the first violin's octave leap in the initial section then becomes a startling assault up through almost two octaves, the more startling for being unaccompanied.

The *Adagio* begins richly and authoritatively in E flat, out of which the first violin leads a turn into the related C minor. Heartbeats from its companions then lay the ground for its sweetly dissonant embarking on an even more beautiful melody as second subject, answered by the cello. All is recapitulated with a coda.

Mozart originally sketched a polonaise finale but replaced it with a fast sonata movement full of high spirits.

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