

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 29 March 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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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet No. 14 in G K387 'Spring' (1782)

I. Allegro vivace assai • II. Menuetto •

III. Andante cantabile • IV. Molto allegro

Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975)

Echoes for String Quartet (1965)

Prelude - Valse lente - Elegy - Scherzo - Nocturne -

Habañera - Scherzo macabre - Pastorale - Allegro - Epilogue

Interval

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

String Quartet No. 22 in B flat K589 'Prussian' (1790)

I. Allegro • II. Larghetto • III. Menuetto. Moderato • IV. Allegro assai

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Mozart was evidently astonished by the appearance in 1782 of Haydn's Op. 33 quartets, and began work on a set of his own to be dedicated to the senior composer. 'Long and laborious study', he noted in his dedication, had been required to create these compositions, and the signs remain in, for example, his working materials for this G major, which include four different drafts of a passage in the finale. Moreover, when he finished what was the first quartet of the group – on the last day of 1782, according to his note on the manuscript – more than two years were to pass before the set was complete.

Not the least of the lessons Mozart learned from Haydn was how a whole world could be created from the minutest idea. In the case of this quartet, the very beginning – a lift through a fifth, then a fourth, from G to D to G again – sets out intervals that determine and frame much else in this movement, and indeed in the whole work. The arrival at the second subject leaves the first violin a bystander, but one who then jumps in to repeat the theme an octave higher. So it is again in the recapitulation, which succeeds a development that covers most of the exposition's ideas sooner or later.

Next comes a minuet that survives some effective rhythmic cramping: chords on third beats rather than firsts, and chromatic scales, at first from the first violin unaccompanied, whose dynamic markings try to fit them into duple patterns rather than triple. The trio brings in drama of its own, with a unison assertion of G minor, demanding response.

The slow movement is in sonata form, and in a C major that seems to have this disturbing jolt of the minor mode in its memory.

Mozart starts the finale with a stock contrapuntal tag, and it seems we are in for a fugue – but not for long, before the music spills over in brilliance. This is again a sonata movement, and the second subject is treated fugally at greater length. When everything has been developed and recapitulated, a coda restores the movement's initial idea, and its humour.

Working constantly for films and television from 1941 (*Citizen Kane*) onwards, **Bernard Herrmann** wrote just a few independent pieces during this period: an opera on *Wuthering Heights*, a string quartet and a clarinet quintet. The quartet came in 1965 as a 20-minute single movement made up of distinct episodes. Its title, *Echoes*, surely refers to how these all recall the dark *Prelude*, out of whose two-note gestures they arise,

only to fall back again as this music proves to be omnipresent – an obsession, such as Herrmann found music for in so many of his film scores.

The first character piece is a slow waltz, the second a cello song and the third a whirling fast number. Next comes another song, this one for the first violin, with the cello answering in its lowest voice; this is also another slow waltz. The *Habañera* that follows is all in the viola part, as the others decline this time the invitation to dance – though the first violin agrees to sing. Acid sounds from bowing close to the bridge or the fingerboard, in rotating repetitions, introduce the *Scherzo macabre*, after which another song, featuring first violin and cello, brings solace. The final episode is the most dynamic, as if breaking the echoes' spell. But no, the unignorable memories soon seep back, and lead ineluctably into a full *Epilogue*.

In May 1789 Mozart visited Berlin in order to recommend himself to the king of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm II, a great patron of the arts. Whether or not Friedrich Wilhelm formally commissioned a set of string quartets is unclear, but Mozart wrote a quartet for him soon afterwards and another two a year later. Then he dropped the project, because payment was not forthcoming.

The three works he completed form his last group of quartets, graceful and airy, and united, too, in honouring the king as a proficient cellist – though Mozart was probably expecting that Jean-Pierre Duport, the king's teacher and director of chamber music, would take part in performances. Whoever the player, the cello is brought forward in the first movement's second subject to offer short melodic phrases in alternation with running triplets from the first violin. (In the recapitulation the roles are reassigned.) The development at its crisis mingles the second subject's triplets with the first's twiddles.

Prominent again in the E flat *Larghetto*, the cello sings the opening strain above second violin and viola, the first violin for the moment silent. Dramatic fortés in the latter part of the movement again favour the cello.

The minuet has a long trio section, also in E flat, whose second part begins with surprising chromaticism.

A touch of harmonic straying in the finale is just fun.

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