

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 29 October 2023  
7.30pm

## Chiaroscuro Quartet

Alina Ibragimova violin  
Charlotte Saluste-Bridoux violin  
Emilie Hörnlund viola  
Claire Thirion cello

Matthew Hunt clarinet

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in D Op. 33 No. 6 (1781)

*I. Vivace assai • II. Andante •  
III. Scherzo. Allegretto • IV. Finale. Allegretto*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Clarinet Quintet in A K581 (1789)

*I. Allegro • II. Larghetto • III. Menuetto •  
IV. Allegretto con variazioni*

Interval

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

String Quartet No. 2 in A minor Op. 13 (1827)

*I. Adagio - Allegro vivace • II. Adagio non lento •  
III. Intermezzo. Allegretto con moto - Allegro di  
molto • IV. Presto - Adagio non lento*



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Towards the end of 1781 **Haydn** announced the appearance of six new string quartets. They were his first for almost ten years, and were, he claimed, written 'in a new and special manner'. One of their novel features was a type of piece labelled either 'scherzo' or 'scherzando', and if the historical significance of these movements has sometimes been exaggerated, Haydn's new comic style is of central importance to the quartets, which are informed throughout by his experience of *opera buffa*.

Not the least remarkable feature in the new quartets' opening movements is their tendency to fuse development and recapitulation. In the D major Quartet Op. 33 No. 6 the recapitulation actually gets under way in the wrong key, and only makes its way homewards part way through the main subject. But no sooner has Haydn re-established the sound of D major than he plunges into a further passage of development, modulating continually through remote tonal regions.

The theme of the D minor slow movement unfolds in the middle of the quartet texture, with the first violin sustaining a single note A throughout the initial five bars. After this beautifully scored beginning, the first violin takes the melodic initiative – especially so in the middle section. Following a return of the opening melody the music reaches a climax that offers the first violinist the opportunity to contribute a miniature cadenza, before the piece dies away.

The third movement owes its scherzo character to its stabbing off-beat accents, which form a strong contrast to the much better-behaved cello melody of the trio's beginning. The easy-going *Finale* is one of Haydn's deliberately ambiguous designs – part rondo, part variation. At first it seems as though he is going to be content to allow it to end quietly and unassumingly; but after a moment's silence he throws in a gesture that brings it to a good-humouredly blunt conclusion after all.

On 23 March 1784 a benefit concert was held for the clarinettist Anton Stadler at Vienna's Burgtheater. The programme included movements from **Mozart's** Serenade for 13 wind instruments K361, in which Stadler and his younger brother Johann may well have opted to take the lower-pitched basset horn parts, rather than the clarinets. Four years later, Stadler gave another concert in the same venue, using a clarinet constructed by Theodor Lotz, the instrument maker attached to the Viennese Court. Lotz's bass clarinet (or basset clarinet, as it is now called) extended the lower range of the normal instrument by four semitones. Mozart almost certainly wrote both his clarinet quintet and the concerto in the same key of A major (K622) for the basset clarinet. Alas, his autograph scores are lost, and when the works were published after his death the clarinet part was altered to fit the compass of the normal instrument. Nowadays, many players, including Matthew Hunt, use a clarinet with an extended range, reconstructing what Mozart may well have written in those passages where the part doubles back on itself, rather than follow a plainer ascent or descent.

Mozart's quintet is a largely relaxed affair, and its serene slow movement has a seemingly endless clarinet melody unfolding to the sound of muted strings. The following minuet takes a step towards the old-fashioned divertimento form by having two contrasting trios the first of them, in the minor, for the string quartet alone (giving the clarinettist a well-earned rest), and the second in *Ländler* style.

Mozart casts his finale as a set of variations on a perky gavotte-like theme. His use of variations to round the work off was echoed by Brahms and Reger, in the two most significant clarinet quintets written since.

**Mendelssohn** spent the first part of the summer of 1827 holidaying in the town of Sakrow, near Potsdam. While there, he composed a tiny song called 'Frage' ('Question'). Mendelssohn used its melody as the framework of a string quartet he began composing shortly afterwards. He was only 18 at the time, and the quartet Op. 13 is a miraculously precocious work whose complex cyclic form is wholly original. Its slow introduction comes to a half close recalling the opening phrase from 'Frage'. At this stage, the song-quotation is no more than a passing allusion; only much later, when the same passage returns to round the work off, is the quotation elaborated: 'Is it true that you always wait for me there in the arbour by the vine wall, and ask the moonlight and stars for news of me?'

The restlessness of the main body of the first movement spills over into the slow movement, whose relaxed main theme soon gives way to a fugato on a chromatic subject which seems to have stepped straight out of Beethoven's 'Serioso' quartet Op. 95. The third movement is a piece that manages to fuse the elements of a gentle serenade, and a fleeting scherzo of gossamer lightness and transparency. Following the abbreviated reprise of the serenade the pace accelerates, and the scherzo material is combined with the serenade's opening phrase, allowing the music to fade away into the distance.

The finale begins in dramatic fashion, with a forceful, discordant tremolo, while the first violin launches into a passionate burst of recitative – one of the many details in the work Mendelssohn seems to have modelled on Beethoven's late A minor Quartet Op. 132. The development section is notable for the reappearance of the slow movement's chromatic fugato subject, combined this time with the characteristic upbeat phrase of the finale's main theme. The fugato subject makes a further return towards the end, where, in a wonderful inspiration, it floats high above a shimmering accompaniment. Now, at last, the music winds down in preparation for its song-like conclusion, and an unaccompanied violin recitative, whose melodic contour seems to gather together the threads of the entire work, leads to the expanded reprise of the quartet's opening song-quotation.

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