

WIGMORE HALL 125

Thursday 2 July 2026
7.30pm

Leonidas Kavakos violin
Kirill Gerstein piano
The Apollon Ensemble
Alexandros Sakarellos violin
Ilias Livieratos viola
Timotheos Petrin cello

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) String Trio in G Op. 9 No. 1 (1797-8)
I. Adagio – Allegro con brio • II. Adagio, ma non tanto e cantabile • III. Scherzo. Allegro • IV. Presto

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) Terzetto in C Op. 74 (1887)
I. Introduzione. Allegro ma non troppo • II. Larghetto • III. Scherzo. Vivace • IV. Tema con variazioni. Poco adagio

Interval

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) Piano Quintet in E flat Op. 44 (1842)
I. Allegro brillante • II. In modo d'una marcia. Un poco largamente – Agitato • III. Scherzo. Molto vivace • IV. Allegro ma non troppo



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The string trio repertoire is meagre when compared with that of the string quartet. Nevertheless, there are a few masterpieces, especially Mozart's *Divertimento* K563 and Schoenberg's intense, post-trauma String Trio. **Beethoven** composed a group of three published as Op. 9, all of them substantial, which at that time he described as 'the finest of his works'. The *Adagio* introduction of Op. 9 No. 1 (1797-8) opens with two bars of *fortissimo* unison and ends in Beethoven's characteristic teasing manner. Beginning with apparently insignificant material, as Beethoven often does, the following *Allegro con brio* has a striking diversity of themes, including in its first subject group a little march in the unexpected key of D minor. In the development Beethoven gives a more important role to the deceptively subsidiary material with which the *Allegro* began. The delightful lead-back to the recapitulation includes a reference to music from the introduction, then in the coda the viola's *fortissimo tremolando* adds to the intensity. The eloquent E major slow movement (in 3/4 but 9/8 in effect) develops into groups of flowing semiquavers, after some lovely violin/viola dialogue. The return of the opening melody gives way to a restless central section underpinned by the cello's animated semiquavers. In the coda little reminders of the opening subject compensate for its absence in the recapitulation. The *Scherzo* is characterised by a genial rhythmic swing, its second section including a little development, whereas the trio begins straightforwardly enough but peters out (*calando*) three times. This mock-forgetfulness reminds one of Haydn.

The brilliant sonata-form finale has scampering *moto perpetuo* passages and a delightfully contrasting second subject beginning in B flat major. In the development Beethoven presents the melody from bar 9, marked *dolce*, in E flat major, then the second subject in G minor and other flat keys. *Pianissimo* treatment of an inversion of the second subject, above syncopated accompaniment, unobtrusively leads to the recapitulation. This marvellous trio must rank among the most outstanding of Beethoven's pre-1800 works.

Having already written more than ten string quartets, **Dvořák** composed this unusually scored *Terzetto* early in 1887 for himself (viola) and two violinist friends. The opening theme, marked *espressivo*, is tinged with wistfulness. Soon agitated semiquaver passagework begins to dominate, intensifying towards a *fortissimo* climax. A shortened and chromatically inflected return of the opening material leads to a brief coda, including three surprising *fortissimo* chords. The *Larghetto* follows without a break. In E major, this deeply lyrical movement in 6/8 has a middle section characterised by urgent and persistent dotted rhythm, which finally subsides into a varied recall of the opening. In A minor, the following movement is in the style of a Czech dance known as the *furiant*, characterised by cross-rhythms. The second violin presents the main idea in double-stopping, accompanied by pizzicato on the other instruments. In the tonic major key, the elegant, waltz-like trio is more relaxed and reflective. The curious C minor theme of the

final variation-movement, tonally unstable and marked *Poco adagio*, gives rise to a turbulent first variation (marked *Molto allegro*) dominated by dotted rhythm. The remaining nine variations, all brief, cover a wide expressive range, from intensely rhythmic to thoughtful, and accommodating frequent chromaticism. Towards the end Dvořák includes a dramatic passage of recitative with tremolando accompaniment. This finale culminates in a *Molto allegro* energised by many accented notes.

Whereas **Schumann's** string quartets are still generally neglected by performers and scholars alike, his Piano Quintet (autumn 1842) is among the most popular of all chamber works. It is also the first great landmark in this hitherto under-developed medium. (Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet has a double bass). One senses that this captivating, spontaneous-sounding work was written during one of Schumann's periodic fevers of inspiration. It begins vigorously (*Allegro brillante*) with wide, striding intervals, but quite soon the piano anticipates a tender melody on cello then viola – one of Schumann's characteristic transformations of mood. The development begins with a slightly disturbing descending phrase; its reappearance in the following movement is one of several cross-references in this supremely well-crafted work.

The sombre, march-like opening of the second movement leads to a dream-like poetic interlude then back to the opening music. A reminiscence of the descending phrase from the first movement development gives way to an *Agitato* section, in which Schumann subtly transforms the melodic shape of the march at a faster speed. This transformation now becomes the background to a *fortissimo* recall of the march on the viola, then a return of the dreamlike episode and final, subdued version of the opening.

In the energetic and buoyant *Scherzo* in 6/8 Schumann demonstrates how scale-passages may be stamped with individual character when given strong rhythmic direction and phrasing towards the second beat. The lyrical melody of the first *Trio* may be regarded as an approximate inversion of the Quintet's opening bars, whereas the second *Trio* section in A flat minor provides a different contrast in *moto perpetuo* manner. A thrilling two-bar link returns us to the *Scherzo*.

The finale's resolute opening in G minor, its energy largely derived from the repeated quavers in the strings, is followed by a more relaxed and playful passage. Throughout the movement Schumann maintains the previous degree of melodic invention within a highly unorthodox, innovative structure and tonal scheme, but this is also a tour de force of contrapuntal skill. In the extended coda, following a big climax, the opening theme of the work is augmented as a fugal counter-subject to the finale's opening theme. Schumann's genius is nowhere more apparent than in this masterly quintet, which his wife Clara described as 'Magnificent – a work filled with energy and freshness'.

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