

WIGMORE HALL

Hagen Quartet

Lukas Hagen violin
Rainer Schmidt violin
Veronika Hagen viola
Clemens Hagen cello

Friday 3 February 2023
7.30pm

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*

String Quartet No. 15 in D minor K421 (1783)
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Andante •
III. Menuetto. Allegretto • IV. Allegretto ma non troppo*

Interval

String Quartet No. 17 in B flat K458 'The Hunt' (1784)
*I. Allegro vivace assai • II. Menuetto. Moderato •
III. Adagio • IV. Allegro assai*



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Saturday 4 February 2023
7.30pm

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

String Quartet No. 18 in A K464 (1785)
*I. Allegro • II. Menuetto • III. Andante •
IV. Allegro non troppo*

String Quartet No. 21 in D K575 'Prussian' (1789)
*I. Allegretto • II. Andante •
III. Menuetto. Allegretto • IV. Allegretto*

Interval

String Quartet No. 22 in B flat K589 'Prussian' (1790)
*I. Allegro • II. Larghetto •
III. Menuetto. Moderato • IV. Allegro assai*

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This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Sunday 5 February 2023
11.30am

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

String Quartet No. 20 in D K499 'Hoffmeister' (1786)

*I. Allegretto • II. Menuetto. Allegretto •
III. Adagio • IV. Molto allegro*

String Quartet No. 23 in F K590 'Prussian' (1790)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Allegretto •
III. Menuetto. Allegretto • IV. Allegro*



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The 'Haydn' Quartets

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

Allegro vivace assai • *Menuetto*
Andante cantabile • *Molto allegro*

String Quartet No. 15 in D minor K421 (1783)

Allegro moderato • *Andante*
Menuetto. Allegretto • *Allegretto ma non troppo*

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

Allegro vivace assai • *Menuetto. Moderato*
Adagio • *Allegro assai*

String Quartet No. 18 in A K464 (1785)

Allegro • *Menuetto*
Andante • *Allegro non troppo*

In the autumn of 1782 Haydn announced the publication of his six string quartets Op. 33. They were his first quartets for ten years, and he proudly described them as having been written in 'an entirely new and special manner'. It was their appearance that inspired Mozart to return to the medium, which he, too, had not cultivated for nearly a decade. On the last day of the year in which Haydn's quartets were published Mozart completed his String Quartet in G K387 - the first in a set of six string quartets he eventually dedicated to the older composer. In a long and affectionate tribute to Haydn which prefaced the pieces when they were issued nearly three years later, he described them as 'the fruit of long and laborious effort'.

The difficulty Mozart experienced in composing his quartets reflects not only the special responsibility he felt in trying to live up to Haydn's example, but also the new-found complexity of the music itself. Certainly, he composed few works that were more densely argued than the **String Quartet in G K387**. In the year he composed it he had been studying the fugues of Bach and Handel, and the results were put to brilliant use in the quartet's finale - a wholly original fusion of fugue and sonata form. Mozart was pleased enough with the outcome to do something similar some half-dozen years later in his 'Jupiter' Symphony. In both works the finale is deliberately based on an uninspired motif - a contrapuntal 'tag' of the kind that might have stepped straight out of a textbook on fugal technique - and the challenge of creating an imposing musical edifice out of such unpromising material was clearly one that Mozart enjoyed.

The quartet's finale comes as the last in an unbroken succession of pieces in sonata form. Even the minuet is a clear sonata design, with a well-defined second subject, development and recapitulation. It must surely be one of the longest such pieces Mozart ever wrote. The trio is in the minor, and its opening bars, given out in forceful octaves, are remarkably jagged.

Mozart makes a momentary return to G minor in the second stage of the slow movement's exposition, but the *Andante* is otherwise a piece that breathes an air of serenity. Mozart chooses to expand and elaborate on his material within the framework of the recapitulation, where the music makes a magical excursion from its home key of C major into the warmth and softness of the key a semitone above - D flat.

The manuscripts of the second and third quartets in Mozart's series are undated, and so we can't be sure as to exactly when he completed them. However, Constanze Mozart later maintained that the **String Quartet in D minor K421** had been written at the time of her confinement preceding the birth of their first child, Raimund, in the summer of 1783. According to one anecdote, the quartet's minuet was composed as she was actually being delivered of her baby, on 17 June. If true, perhaps the unusually forceful minuet was Mozart's mental means of drowning the noise in the next room. It must have been all over by the time he reached the trio, in which he appears to be serenading his new-born son with a violin tune to a pizzicato accompaniment in imitation of a guitar. Alas, after only two months Raimund died of intestinal cramp.

The quartet begins *sotto voce*, with a yearning melody which carries a feeling of infinite melancholy. The air of subdued intensity is largely dispelled by the relaxed second subject, though it returns in the movement's concentrated development section, which sets off with a startling plunge onto a very distant key before the music moves mysteriously towards altogether darker realms. The recapitulation remains entirely in the minor, and the second subject is now imbued with the same tragic air as the first.

Following the unusual intensity of the first movement, Mozart provides a slow movement beginning in an atmosphere of great warmth and serenity. However, the second half of its theme sets off in the minor with a series of sighing cadences each more dissonant than the last, and the tension of this moment is resolved only at the very end of the movement.

Uniquely among Mozart's string quartets, the finale is written as a set of variations on a gently lilting theme in siciliano rhythm. The emotional highpoint of the piece is a warmly expressive variation in the major, whose new-found radiance enhances the music's poignancy. Following the return to the minor for a further variation, there a coda in a quicker tempo. The forceful final cadence marks a turn back to the major, in a change that actually increases its intensity.

Mozart entered the **'Hunt' Quartet K458** in his running catalogue of works on 9 November 1784, but he is likely to have begun work on it in the spring or summer of the previous year. The first movement is written in an urgent 6/8 metre, and the quartet takes its nickname from the horn-calls with which it begins. The minuet, with its elegant 'trotting' trio, is followed by the work's expressive heart, in the shape of one of Mozart's profound *Adagios*. Its sonorously harmonised initial phrase is followed by a rising arpeggio for solo violin. The theme's second half is curtailed, and a modified rising arpeggio culminates in a passionate violin melody setting off in C minor, to a 'throbbing' repeated-note accompaniment. A similar accompaniment threads its way through the yearning second subject, which is shared this time between first violin and cello.

The finale is characterised by the staccato repeated notes of its main theme, with only the exposition's closing subject – a gradually accelerating series of rising fourths – offering smoother contrast. That contrast is short-lived, before a fragment of the opening theme returns, this time in combination with legato upper parts, in a piece of quadruple counterpoint that neatly binds the exposition's two stages together. While the opening movement had a substantial coda this one has none at all, Mozart simply bringing it to a close with the same emphatic figure that had rounded off the exposition.

Of all Mozart's great string quartets, it was the **String Quartet in A K464** that seems to have been Beethoven's favourite. He used it as a blueprint for his own quartet in the same key, Op. 18 No. 5, and took its minuet as the model for the second movement, also in A major, of his late String Quartet Op. 132. Mozart's minuet, like Beethoven's piece, is based on two tiny melodic phrases which are heard in every conceivable contrapuntal combination. In the minuet's second half Mozart shows that the two ideas can be played simultaneously, not only in their original form, but also in inversion.

The opening movement shows further instances of Mozart's contrapuntal skill. No sooner has its relatively straightforward main theme run its course than its 'winding' initial phrase is presented in a series of closely overlapping statements. Moreover, the tiny idea in octaves which had formed a pendant to the main subject is later used as the springboard for a piece of spectacularly intricate contrapuntal writing that forms a transition from the development to the start of the recapitulation.

As he had done in the 'Hunt' quartet, Mozart places the slow movement after the minuet, throwing the weight of the work as a whole onto its latter half. The variation slow movement was initially conceived on a

smaller scale: Mozart's autograph score that the two variations preceding the expanded final variation were inserted as an afterthought, and in reverse order. The cello's timpani-like ostinato figure in the final variation has given rise to the nickname of the 'Drum' that is sometimes attached to the quartet as a whole.

Like the minuet, the finale is constructed out of a pair of thematic 'tags', the first of them no more than a four-note chromatic descent, the second a 'rocking' motif. However, Mozart unobtrusively introduces two further melodic fragments during the course of the development section, where they are played in combination with the chromatic descent. The recapitulation manages miraculously to combine both elements of the main subject with the two ideas introduced in the development; and the work is brought to a gentle close with a 'sighing' combination of the chromatic phrase and the first of the development's fragments.

The 'Hoffmeister' Quartet

String Quartet No. 20 in D K499 'Hoffmeister' (1786)
Allegretto • Menuetto. Allegretto
Adagio • Molto allegro

Among Mozart's ten great string quartets, the strikingly beautiful **'Hoffmeister' Quartet K499** occupies an isolated position. Mozart had completed the six quartets dedicated to Haydn by the beginning of 1785, and he was to embark on the group of three 'Prussian' quartets in the summer of 1789. Nothing is known of the circumstances which led him in August 1786 to write and publish a lone string quartet – an unusual procedure in an age when such works were almost invariably issued in series. The composer Franz Anton Hoffmeister established his music publishing business in 1784, and in the following years he issued several great works by Mozart, though his name has remained attached to the string quartet K499.

One of the wonders of the 'Hoffmeister' quartet's first movement is the chiaroscuro effect of its manifold shifts of key. Another is the tiny, delicate 'rocking' motif introduced right at the end of the exposition. In a lesser composer's hands, this would merely have been a conventional means of rounding off this section of the piece, but Mozart uses the same insignificant-sounding phrase as a thread running through the entire development section, where it appears in combination with the main subject. The motif returns in the coda, where it accompanies a final harmonic twist within the main subject before allowing this delicately transparent piece to disappear into thin air.

The minuet's theme is given out over a repeated pedal-note in the cello, while the viola's chromatic descent in long notes adds harmonic pungency. When the melody returns at the end of the second half, the viola answers it in a free canon. The trio is gently agitated; and rather than allow to reach its natural conclusion, Mozart interrupts its final cadence by making an abrupt return to the minuet – a join of a kind that is extremely rare in his music.

The slow movement is one of Mozart's most expansive, with melodic material of remarkable freedom and flexibility. The sighing phrases given out by the violins in mellifluous thirds at the beginning sound like the strands of vocal duet; and the same phrases are later transferred to the viola and cello, while the violins superimpose a soaring new idea. Meanwhile, the first violin has taken flight in the first of its many elaborate cadenza-like passages during the course of the piece.

The finale begins hesitantly, with scraps of melody separated by silences, but it soon becomes positively garrulous – nowhere more so than in its second subject, whose staccato phrases are thrown continually from violin to cello. In the recapitulation the main subject's silences are filled in by means of an answering voice in the second violin. They make a return, however, in the unusually expansive coda, before a series of sweeping phrases of almost exaggeratedly determined continuity bring the quartet to a witty conclusion.

The three 'Prussian' Quartets

String Quartet No. 21 in D K575 'Prussian' (1789)

Allegretto • Andante

Menuetto. Allegretto • Allegretto

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

Allegro • Larghetto

Menuetto. Moderato • Allegro assai

String Quartet No. 23 in F K590 'Prussian' (1790)

Allegro moderato • Andante

Menuetto. Allegretto • Allegro

In the spring of 1789 Mozart travelled to Berlin, in the company of Beethoven's future patron Prince Karl Lichnowsky. On 26 May he played in front of the Prussian King, Friedrich Wilhelm II. The King was a keen amateur cellist, and Mozart resolved to write a set of six string quartets for him. So eager was he to begin work on the project, which he clearly hoped would bring in some much-needed income, that he began work on it immediately. By the time he returned to Vienna, on 4 June, it seems likely that he had composed the whole of the first work in the series, K575, as well as the opening movement and

the bulk of the *Larghetto* of its successor, K589. Mozart entered K575 into his catalogue of works at some point in June, but the remainder of the year was largely taken up with work on *Così fan tutte*, and it wasn't until the following May that he took up the threads of his quartets. K589, was completed that month, and the F major Quartet K590 – Mozart's last work of its kind – in June.

The three works Mozart managed to complete were not published until shortly after his death, when they were issued as 'concertante' quartets. The unusual description was no accident: with these pieces Mozart had set himself the particularly difficult challenge of allowing the cello – the King's instrument – an unusual degree of melodic prominence. He would hardly have been satisfied with simply writing bottom-heavy quartets, and so if the cello was to be melodically emancipated, it would have to be as part of a generally relaxed, conversational ensemble.

In the opening subject of the first work in the series, the **Quartet in D K575**, Mozart in fact neglected to allot a prominent role to the cello, but in compensation he allowed it to lead off in the second subject, whose short phrases are passed from one instrument to the other, almost in the manner of an operatic quartet. However, an entire movement built out of such material would clearly lack the tension necessary for a piece on so large a scale, and Mozart's solution lay in the tiny phrase in quick notes which separates the main theme's two halves. He duly used the phrase to generate an intensely-worked passage in the central development section.

It is above all in the two middle movements that the cello assumes an unusually prominent role. Like the opening subject of the first movement, the *Andante's* theme is played *sotto voce*. It is followed by another of Mozart's operatic quartets, and eventually by a further subject played in the cello's topmost register. The cello leads again in the reprise of the opening theme, before the piece sinks to a serene close.

If the minuet itself presents a more conventional string quartet texture, its trio is essentially an accompanied cello solo, and the theme of the finale is again given out in the form of a cello solo, this time with viola accompaniment. The finale's theme is one that lends itself to treatment in the form of a closely-knit canon, and Mozart does not neglect the opportunity to present it as such during the course of the piece. Particularly fine from this point of view are the central episode, where cello and viola have the theme in canon by inversion, with the violins interjecting a new 'running' idea, also answering each other in mirror form; and a later passage which has two inversion canons running simultaneously.

The second subject of the opening *Allegro* in the **Quartet in B flat K589** sets off as a duet for cello and viola – once more with the melody given to the cello – before the melodic line passes to the first violin, in a passage scored for the three upper instruments. There is further string trio writing at the start of the slow movement, where the cello has the upper voice in a strikingly beautiful piece of scoring. Not until the ninth bar does the first violin enter, taking over the cello's long cantabile melody. The second subject is similarly shared between cello and violin, with the roles of the two instruments reversed when it returns in the recapitulation.

If the cello is given the opportunity to shine in the quartet's first half, it is the violin that grasps the virtuoso reins in the minuet. Its concluding bars confront the quartet leader with a particularly awkward, high-lying passage, while the trio's closing moments assume the guise of a miniature violin concerto, with the player bowing rapidly back and forth across the strings.

The finale offers a further example of Mozart's seemingly effortless counterpoint. Its initial theme already hints at the canonic writing to come, and its last four notes later provide the springboard for a splendidly energetic contrapuntal episode. In the end, though, Mozart decides to wrap up proceedings with the simplest of conclusions, as though to dismiss the entire display of quartet mastery with a shrug of the shoulders.

Almost everything in the opening *Allegro* of the **F major Quartet K590** derives from the rushing

descending scale – given out in a sudden *forte* – contained within its first theme. Perhaps in view of the exposition's exceptionally strong thematic unity, Mozart bases the first stage of the central development on a new idea which returns much later, in the coda, allowing the piece to come to a gently understated close.

Mozart's autograph score gives the heading of *Andante* for the second movement, though this was altered in the first edition to *Allegretto* – a change that almost certainly stems from him. So, surely, do the first edition's added dynamic markings in those places where the entries of the repeated-note main theme overlap with each other. These are so remarkable, with *forte* in one pair of voices sounding simultaneously with *piano* in the other, that they are unlikely to be editorial.

The minuet is followed by yet another sonata-form movement, in the shape of a high-spirited finale entirely based on the spiralling shape of its initial theme. The exposition's closing moments, with the theme assuming the guise of a rustic dance played above a drone on the viola's two lowest open strings, are scarcely less exhilarating than the sudden shift of key at the start of the development section, where the theme is prolonged into a form of *moto perpetuo* that seems to carry the music in a single sweep right through to its conclusion.

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