WIGMORE HALL

Friday 30 December 2022
7.30pm

Albion Quartet
- **Tamsin Waley-Cohen** violin
- **Emma Parker** violin
- **Ann Beilby** viola
- **Nathaniel Boyd** cello

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) — String Quartet in G Op. 33 No. 5 (1781)
I. Vivace assai • II. Largo e cantabile • III. Scherzo - Trio • IV. Finale. Allegretto

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975) — String Quartet No. 3 in F Op. 73 (1946)
I. Allegretto • II. Moderato con moto • III. Allegro non troppo • IV. Adagio • V. Moderato

Interval

William Walton (1902-1983) — String Quartet No. 2 in A minor (1945-6)
I. Allegro • II. Presto • III. Lento • IV. Allegro molto

CLASSIC fM Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM

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

Friends of Wigmore Hall – celebrating 30 years of friendship

Over the past 30 years, Friends have been providing transformational support for the Hall, ensuring this historic building remains a home for great music making. Enjoy the benefits of friendship by joining as a Friend today, and be a part of the Wigmore story. **Visit: wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends | Call: 020 7258 8230**

FRIENDS OF WIGMORE HALL 30

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.
In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.
Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.
Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.

Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

Haydn composed his 6 Quartets Op. 33 over the summer and autumn of 1781, claiming that they had been written 'in a new and entirely special way'. It was a canny sales pitch, designed to draw the attention of patrons and audiences alike. It clearly worked – the quartets were published in Amsterdam, Berlin and Paris, as well as in the Austrian capital. At least one of them was heard in the Viennese apartment of Grand Duke Paul of Russia on Christmas Day 1781, and Haydn later dedicated to the entire set to the future Tsar, giving rise to their 'Russian' nickname. Another nickname in early editions was '*gli scherzo*', and the quartets certainly feel like musical evocations of the genteel conversation that was characteristic of salon culture at the time. They also attest to the influence of Italian *opera buffa*. Haydn had spent much of the 1770s composing comic operas for his patron, Prince Esterházy, and the musical language of the stage spills over into each of the Op. 33 quartets.

The Quartet No. 5 in G eventually acquired the nickname 'How do you do?', although this was clearly the invention of an English admirer, who spotted that the recurrent cadential figure that opens the first movement could be sung to those words. Haydn is unlikely to have this phrase in mind, of course, yet there is certainly something gallant about the opening *Vivace* movement. The ensuing *Largo* allows for greater depth and complexity of emotion, and some have detected an allusion to an aria from Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*, which Haydn had directed at Esterháza in 1776. In the third movement, the conventional minuet is replaced by a jerky, lopsided *Scherzo* to which no one could possibly dance. Grace returns in the *Finale*, a series of lilting variations that close with a brisk and vigorous presto.

Haydn became known as the 'father of the string quartet', and after him, the quartet would become a staple for almost every great composer in the Austro-German tradition, above all Beethoven. Over the course of the 19th Century and then into the 20th, it was taken up by composers across Europe, from France to Bohemia, Hungary, Finland and Russia. For many, the 20th Century's heir to Beethoven was Shostakovich, whose 15 quartets have often been interpreted as a series of profoundly personal documents to match his more public 15 symphonies.

Some have heard the Quartet No. 3 in F Op. 73 as an attempt to convey the experience of the Second World War in musical form. Its five movements – composed between 26 January and 2 August 1946 – may have originally had explicit subtitles, although these were later suppressed:

I. 'Calm unawareness of the future cataclysm'
II. 'Rumblings of unrest and anticipation'
III. 'The forces of war unleashed'
IV. 'Homage to the dead'
V. 'The eternal question: Why? And for what?'

Whether these were meant in earnest, or designed to distract the censor, the quartet certainly mimics the structure and even the tempo markings of the wartime Symphony No. 8, and there are similarities with the Symphony No. 9 too. Whatever the authenticity of the narrative that some have read into it, the quartet was particularly dear to its composer. For Shostakovich, as for many so Soviet citizens, contemplating the suffering of the war years became a way of alluding to the unspeakable trauma of the Stalin era more generally. The violist Fyodor Druzhinin recalled him weeping at a rehearsal: 'the only time that I saw Shostakovich so open and defenceless'. Other listeners were haunted by it too, singling out the solemn and moving passacaglia that forms its fourth movement, and above all the ethereal chords that bring the finale to its enigmatic conclusion.

In March 1946, even as Shostakovich was at work on his third quartet, Winston Churchill gave his famous speech at Fulton, Missouri, in which he identified the first days of what would become the Cold War:

> From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow.

Towards the end of the war, and on the other side of the Iron Curtain, Walton embarked on his Quartet No. 2 in A minor. His first quartet (1919-22) had been the work of a precocious teenager that had drawn the praise of Berg. Walton himself dismissed it as being 'full of undigested Bartók and Schoenberg', and he subsequently withdrew it.

Work on the second quartet was slow and protracted, as Walton complained to a friend: 'I'm in a suicidal struggle with four strings and am making no headway whatsoever. Brick walls, slit trenches…' A little later, however, he confided that he had 'captured a trench', as well as dealing with 'some barbed wire entanglements'. During the war, Walton had written scores for a number of patriotic propaganda films, as well as Laurence Olivier's version of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Now, released from commissions he had found onerous and, at times, uninspiring, he revelled in the freedom that the abstraction of chamber music afforded him. The quartet reveals his mastery of counterpoint and form, as well as his abiding lyricism. It is also a confidently cosmopolitan work, with nods to Hindemith (who had premiered Walton's Viola Concerto in 1929) and, above all, Ravel.

© Philip Ross Bullock 2022
Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.