

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 30 June 2025
7.30pm

Leonkoro Quartet

Jonathan Schwarz violin
Saki Tozawa violin
Mayu Konoe viola
Lukas Schwarz cello

Henriëtte Bosmans (1895-1952)

String Quartet (1927)

*I. Allegro molto moderato •
II. Lento • III. Allegro molto*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

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

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

Interval

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

String Quartet in F (1902-3)

*I. Allegro moderato, très doux • II. Assez vif,
très rythmé • III. Très lent • IV. Vif et agité*



UNDER 35S

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The Dutch pianist and composer **Henriëtte Bosmans** was born in 1895 into a highly musical family. Her mother taught piano at the Amsterdam Conservatory, and her father was principal cellist of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, though he died a few months after she was born. Following in her mother's footsteps, Bosmans made her name as a pianist, giving a concert debut in her teens and taking on pupils. As a composer, her early compositions show the influence of German romanticism. Her 1927 string quartet, however, came at a time she was studying with the composer Willem Pijper – to whom it is dedicated – and reveals the influence of Ravel and Debussy.

This lyrical work is in three short movements. The first is bookended with a stark pentatonic melody, which is developed in lush harmonic language, alternating fitfully between passages of activity and repose. The introspective second movement is led by a slowly unfolding theme and wandering accompaniment, and the finale, underscored by a fast galloping rhythm, seemingly derives from a sped-up variation of the same melody. A more lethargic section emerges, marked by sighing figures, before this compact work is rounded off with a forceful conclusion.

Mozart's 'Prussian' quartets came at a time when the composer was struggling with debt. In 1789, he travelled to Berlin with his friend and pupil Prince Karl Lichnowsky, no doubt hoping to find favour in the Prussian court. In a begging letter to his creditor Michael von Puchberg in July of that year, Mozart wrote that he was composing six quartets for the Prussian King, Frederick William II. But nearly a year later, in June 1790, he complained of having to sell the three quartets he had completed to meet urgent financial needs, referring to them as 'that troublesome task'.

While the King was a keen amateur cellist and collector of chamber music, there is no evidence that he directly commissioned Mozart for these works, although the prominent cello part that emerges at points suggests that Mozart had him in mind. In any case, when the three quartets were published after Mozart's death in 1791, they bore no royal dedication.

The last of these works is the Quartet in F K590. In the light-hearted first movement the cello has solos in its high register, duetting with the first violin, while the middle two instruments provide accompaniment. But this instrument's prominence is abandoned by the elegant second movement, with a chordal theme in the manner of a gentle dance in 6/8 time, at first stated simply, and then decorated.

The third movement, a minuet, begins in a similarly light vein, but introduces tense chromaticism and stormy contrasts, while grace notes become a feature of the trio section. In the finale, a fast downward-

spiralling theme is treated with contrapuntal ingenuity, its near-continuous flow of semiquavers leavened with playful pauses. Eventually these runs seem to get stuck, stuttering around three notes in the chain, a comical effect that Mozart calls back at the work's conclusion.

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In 1903, Fauré asked his pupils at the Paris Conservatoire to write a work in celebration of the 10th anniversary of Debussy's String Quartet – a work that had helped launch the composer's career. By the end of April, **Ravel** had completed the first draft of his tribute. Fauré was not particularly impressed with the results, though the young Ravel was thrilled to receive Debussy's personal encouragement. Time has also been justly kind to the work, which although indebted to its model is nonetheless distinctive, a brilliant variation on a theme rather than a mere imitation.

That is instantly apparent in the first movement, where a lilting theme in F major provides a suave, ambling variant of Debussy's much *brusqueridée*. There follows a modulation to D minor for the second subject, seductively echoed at the double octave and with pizzicato droplets suggesting a nocturnal setting. The tritone at the tail end of its melody – moving from B flat to E natural – nonetheless sounds a note of disquiet.

Divergences of mood similarly pervade the following dance. Its pizzicato textures were inspired by both Debussy's 'Assez vif et bien rythmé' and the gamelan orchestra Ravel and his contemporaries encountered at the Exposition Universelle in 1889. The use of the Aeolian and Dorian modes, however, suggests a more European, even courtly, sensibility, in turn pointing to the Iberian tropes that often infused the Basque-born Ravel's soundworld. As in the first movement, there is a more reflective middle section, with elements of a Sarabande, before the exuberance returns.

The ensuing *Très lent* is a touching confession, in the cast of the *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899). It certainly defies Stravinsky's quippy description of Ravel's 'watchmaker' artificiality, not least due to the music's rule-breaking harmonic procedures, which may have been one of the reasons Fauré blanched at the score. The work ends, however, with an impulsive hoedown that constantly juxtaposes bars of three and five beats each. The second subject reiterates its equivalent in the first movement, though twilit melancholy has now turned to joy. Finally, Ravel caps his (sole) Quartet with a cheery flurry of sound, providing a new model for future generations, both at home and abroad.

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