

# WIGMORE HALL

Friday 3 January 2024  
7.30pm

## Peasmarsh Chamber Music Festival

Anthony Marwood violin  
Grace Park violin  
Hélène Clément viola  
Richard Lester cello  
Aleksandar Madžar piano  
Steven Mackey electric guitar

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Serenade for string trio in D Op. 8

*I. Marcia. Allegro; Adagio • II. Menuetto.  
Allegretto • III. Adagio in D minor • IV. Allegretto  
alla polacca in F major • V. Tema con variazioni.  
Andante quasi allegretto*

Steven Mackey (b.1956)

The Ancestors: ballet in eight tableaux *world première*  
Commissioned by the Peasmarsh Chamber Music Festival

*Interval*

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Piano Quintet No. 2 in A Op. 81 (1887)

*I. Allegro ma non tanto • II. Dumka. Andante  
con moto • III. Scherzo 'Furiant'. Molto vivace -  
Poco tranquillo • IV. Finale. Allegro*



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Most of the works created by **Beethoven** after his move to Vienna in 1792 were of considerable gravity. Yet the imperial city called out for music of a lighter nature, required to enliven its round of grand balls and private soirees. The charming Serenade for string trio in D Op. 8 proved to be a palpable hit with those who rushed to buy its first edition, the publication of which was announced in the *Wiener Zeitung* in the autumn of 1797. Why Beethoven wrote the work remains unclear, although its composition appears to have been preceded by a period of serious illness. The Serenade's exuberant nature may well reflect the composer's relief at his recovery.

Beethoven trains the spotlight on the violin, bearer of a succession of rich melodies. The work's first movement opens with a proud March, packed with energetic fanfares and sprightly triplet figures; its confident progress yields to a tender-hearted Adagio in which the violin sings an increasingly elaborate aria-without-words. The Menuetto contains a few surprises in its uneven opening phrases and in the Trio, where Beethoven provides each instrument with contrasting patterns of articulation. The movement's *pizzicato* coda prefaces a dramatic change of mood in the Adagio; the shift to sombre introspection is soon blown away by a 'devil-may-care' Scherzo and just as soon restored with a reprise of the Adagio. The Scherzo returns again, truncated by emphatic chords that lead to a sad response in the movement's final Adagio. Beethoven casts care aside with a pulsating polonaise, a joyful rondo driven at first by violin and, in its penultimate episode, by cello. The Serenade concludes with a set of six variations on a theme similar to the melody of 'Che farò senza Euridice?' from Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Beethoven crowns his delightful finale with an unexpected return of the work's opening March.

Peasmarsh Chamber Music Festival, under the co-direction of Richard Lester and Anthony Marwood, has attracted a wealth of world-class musicians to the small East Sussex village for which it is named. Its programmes have featured several significant commissions, the latest of which receives its world première this evening. *The Ancestors*, billed as 'A ballet in eight tableaux', stems from **Steven Mackey's** teenage years as a rock musician and his contemporaneous discovery of Beethoven's late string quartets and Ravel's String Quartet. The work's ancestry is rooted in the trilogy of pieces he composed for electric guitar and string quartet in the late 1980s and early 1990s: 'On the Verge', 'Troubadour Songs' and 'Physical Property'. While all three were originally greeted with scepticism, they have since been eagerly adopted by performers. 'I now regard these works as signature pieces,' notes Mackey. 'Physical Property, in particular, is like a beloved ancestor, born in another time but continuing to live in me through 100+ performances with dozens of string quartets over the past 35 years. With every performance, every reunion I wonder: what would I do now? What would the descendent of Physical Property sound like?'

*The Ancestors* offers cogent answers to the composer's questions. The ending of 'Physical Property', like a sound destined to last forever, echoes in 'Remembrance', the penultimate tableau of Mackey's ballet. 'While the end of Physical Property is the only literal quote,' he observes, 'there are abstracted references [elsewhere] to other ancestors whose DNA make up my current practice, from Byrd to Beethoven, Blues and Zappa.' Unlike his earlier trilogy for electric guitar and string quartet, *The Ancestors* exploits the sound modification effects made possible by a processor unit. These, says Mackey, leads the instrument to inhabit alternative acoustic and psychological spaces. 'This work frequently explores the processing effects that give the guitar access to those other spaces, echoing the past and freezing the present, diffusing, detuning, and harmonizing, creating ripples, wobbles, and buzzes. The textures that arise from the guitar effects act on the quartet less as harmony and counterpoint and more as backdrops or scrims that change the sense of venue. There is an otherness to these sounds and they imbue the mood with an eerie mystery. Given the explicit conversation with my musical past, I imagined a séance with the guitar cast as the spirit guide or medium accessing other planes for the quartet.' *The Ancestors* is dedicated to Anthony Marwood, whom Steven Mackey first met when they performed Physical Property over two decades ago.

In the late summer of 1887, **Dvořák** began work on what would become one of his greatest achievements. The Piano Quintet in A Op. 81 grew from his revision of a much earlier quintet for piano and strings, the manuscript of which he had destroyed; fortunately, he was able to retrieve the full score from the amateur pianist and music critic Jan Ludevít Procházka, who had played in the work's first performance in 1872. Having redrafted his initial attempt at a piano quintet, Dvořák set it aside; it appears that the revision process, undertaken in the spring of 1887, inspired him to make a new contribution to the genre.

The Piano Quintet in A Op. 81 opens with an enchanting cello melody, the yearning nature of which is magnified as the movement's exposition unfolds. Its two contrasting themes, the second introduced by the viola, are developed to yield a great breadth of expression. Dvořák foreshortens the reprise of the first theme in the movement's recapitulation to plunge the listener into a compelling restatement of the second theme and a coda of near-indecent jouissance. The spirit of Czech nationalism and the related drive to elevate Czech art and culture both within and beyond the Austro-Hungarian Empire left their mark on Dvořák's Op. 81, clearly so in its Andante con moto, a *Dumka* comprising an elaborate slow section, rarely other than sombre in mood, a wild vivace and a heart-melting return of the movement's opening material. It is present too in the work's *Furiant* Scherzo and its finale, a rondo of miraculous concision capped by a sublime coda.

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