

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 3 June 2023
7.30pm

Cuarteto Casals

Abel Tomàs violin
Vera Martínez-Mehner violin
Jonathan Brown viola
Arnau Tomàs cello

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

From *Art of Fugue* BWV1080 (by 1742, rev. 1745-9)
Contrapunctus 1 • Contrapunctus 2 •
Contrapunctus 3 • Contrapunctus 4 •
Contrapunctus 5 • Contrapunctus 6

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in F minor Op. 20 No. 5 (1772)
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Menuetto •
III. Adagio • IV. Fuga a 2 soggetti*

Interval

Joseph Haydn

String Quartet in D minor Op. 42 (1785)
*I. Andante ed innocentemente •
II. Menuetto. Allegro - Trio •
III. Adagio e cantabile • IV. Finale. Presto*

String Quartet in E flat Op. 33 No. 2 'The Joke' (1781)
*I. Allegro moderato, cantabile •
II. Scherzo. Allegro • III. Largo sostenuto •
IV. Finale. Presto*

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

Our Audience Fund provides essential unrestricted support for our artistic and learning programmes, connecting thousands of people with music locally, nationally, and internationally. We rely on the generosity of our audience to raise £150,000 each year to support this work. Your gifts are, and continue to be, indispensable.

To donate, please visit <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/support-us/wigmore-hall-audience-fund>

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



The 15 fugues (one of them unfinished) and four canons, all based on the same theme and published the year after his death as *Die Kunst der Fuge (Art of Fugue)*, are **JS Bach's** supreme legacy as a contrapuntist: an encyclopedic compendium of contrapuntal techniques in which, to quote the Bach biographer Malcolm Boyd, 'music, mathematics and philosophy are one'. Bach specified no instrument for *Art of Fugue*, composed largely around 1742, the period of the *Goldberg Variations*. Intended primarily as a work to be studied, it was not played in public until 1927. While it has been performed with forces ranging from solo harpsichord via a saxophone quartet to a full orchestra, the clarity and expressive power of single strings make as satisfying a solution as any.

In tonight's concert the Cuarteto Casals plays the first six numbers, beginning with Contrapunctus (i.e. fugue) 1, which develops the four-bar fugue subject in the soberly archaic 'Palestrina style'. In Contrapunctus 2, the theme is combined with a counter-subject in dotted rhythm, while Contrapunctus 3 intensifies the expression by turning the theme upside down and combining it with a chromatic counter-subject. No. 4, added near the end of Bach's life, modulates more freely than the first three fugues. In both Nos. 5 and 6 the theme is immediately answered by its own inversion. Bach's subtitle 'In stile francese' for No. 6 refers to its pompous dotted rhythms, characteristic of the French Overture.

The string quartet emphatically came of age in 1772 with **Haydn's** set of six published as Op. 20. These magnificent works explore the genre's technical and expressive potential in a new spirit of adventure, with each player accorded a vital, distinct identity.

The opening *Allegro moderato* of No. 5 in F minor recreates the *Empfindsamkeit* ('heightened sensibility') of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach in terms of Haydn's more dynamic, 'goal-orientated' idiom. Unusually for Haydn at this period, there is a distinct second theme, initiated by a confident octave leap and then petering out inconclusively. The coda expands an earlier moment of harmonic mystification and then works a fragment of the second theme to an impassioned, even tragic, climax.

The powerful minuet contrasts a strenuous *forte* statement with a plaintive *piano* answer which Mozart perhaps remembered in the minuet of his G minor String Quintet. The F major trio brings harmonic balm, though with its irregular phrase lengths it is not quite as innocent as first appears. F major returns in the limpid *Adagio*, whose guileless siciliano theme is freely varied with quasi-improvisatory arabesques from the first violin.

Three of the Op. 20 quartets end with fugues. Of these the most austere Baroque is the finale of No. 5, launched by a common tag used by Handel in *Messiah* ('And with His stripes') and Mozart in the *Kyrie* of the *Requiem*. Haydn elaborates the two subjects with every contrapuntal trick of the trade, culminating in a *fortissimo* canon between first violin and cello - all the more dramatic after so much hushed, tense *sotto voce*.

In a letter to the publishers Artaria of April 1784, Haydn wrote that he was working on three 'very short' quartets for a Spanish patron. Either the commission was aborted, or the quartets are lost. But it may be that the Op. 42 quartet (which is short and relatively easy technically) contains music from the Spanish project. Its surface simplicity belies its subtle mastery. The opening movement, with its graceful dialogue textures, is based entirely on the three motifs of its opening theme; and as so often in Haydn's mature works, the recapitulation develops as much as it recapitulates.

There is a similar relaxed give-and-take in the D major *Menuetto*, music of gliding, almost Mozartian elegance, set off by a laconic D minor *Trio* that works its opening in quasi-canonic imitation. The serene *Adagio* that follows is in essence a richly scored meditation on its tranquil opening phrase. As in several of his early symphonies, Haydn fuses the 'learned' and 'popular' styles in his *Finale*, alternating passages of fugato with music that could have strayed straight out of a comic opera.

Haydn had already acquired a reputation for the antic and the eccentric long before he embarked on his Op. 33 quartets in 1781. But these new works, composed with a canny eye to popular appeal (and why not?), take what sober-minded critics in North Germany dubbed 'comic fooling' to a new level of whimsy and caprice. They quickly circulated throughout Europe, exactly as the composer intended, and were a prime influence on Mozart in his six quartets dedicated to Haydn.

Haydn's play with fragmentation and silence at the end of the bubbly tarantella *Finale* of Op. 33 No. 2 has spawned the quartet's English nickname 'The Joke'. Haydn allegedly wrote the ending in order to win a bet that 'the ladies will always begin talking' before the music stops. His outrageous deception, which seems as if it could be extended *ad infinitum*, can still throw listeners of any gender. Clara Schumann wrote that she laughed aloud after a performance by the Joachim Quartet.

The relaxed yet tautly constructed first movement encapsulates Op. 33's spirit of easy conversational give-and-take. Virtually everything grows from its amiable opening phrase. The *Scherzo* second movement is an Austrian peasant dance known as a *Schuhplattler*, with heavy repeated chords to accompany the stomping of feet. In the trio the first violin imitates an Austrian village fiddler, with deliciously vulgar slides between notes that were excised by squeamish 19th-century editors.

Amid this frivolity, the *Largo sostenuto* third movement introduces a note of gentle gravity. It opens, unprecedentedly in Haydn's quartets, with a solemn duet for viola and cello before the two violins repeat the melody, intermittently cushioned by drowsy cello murmurs.

© Richard Wigmore 2023

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.