

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 3 March 2025
1.00pm

Calidore String Quartet

Jeffrey Myers violin
Ryan Meehan violin
Jeremy Berry viola
Estelle Choi cello

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957)

String Quartet No. 3 in D Op. 34 (1944–5)
I. Allegro moderato • II. Scherzo. Allegro molto • III. Sostenuto. Like a Folk Tune • IV. Finale. Allegro con fuoco

Ludwig van Beethoven 1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 16 in F Op. 135 (1826)
I. Allegretto • II. Vivace • III. Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo • IV. Grave, ma non troppo tratto – Allegro



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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



SUPPORT OUR AUDIENCE FUND: EVERY NOTE COUNTS

Ensure Wigmore Hall remains a vibrant hub of musical excellence by making a donation today.
wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate | 020 7258 8220



Join & Support
Donations

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



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Recollections of former times haunted **Erich Wolfgang Korngold** as the Second World War raged in Europe. The composer, forced into exile in the United States following the Nazi takeover of his native Austria, made his name in Hollywood with spectacular soundtrack scores to equally spectacular films, including swashbucklers such as *Captain Blood* and *The Sea Hawk* and the historical romantic dramas *Anthony Adverse* and *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*. The recent release of a unique recording of Korngold playing his Symphony in F sharp Op. 40, most likely made in the early 1950s, underlines the intensity of his engagement with a work that, according to a persuasive argument made by the conductor John Mauceri, is a 'portrait of the war ... inextricably connected to its time'.

Korngold's String Quartet No. 3, written before the war's end, casts light on the all too common experience of exile, of being uprooted from home and adapting to life in a new land. He gave his wife sketches of the piece at Christmas 1944, perhaps as a reminder of the days when his concert works and operas were eagerly consumed by European audiences. (A poll conducted by the Viennese newspaper *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* in August 1930 ranked Korngold among the most influential of Austrian composers.) The high demands of Hollywood left little time for writing concert pieces; it appears, however, that news of Allied victories over the Nazis encouraged Korngold to revisit familiar creative ground and start work on a new string quartet, albeit done as an under-the-radar project.

The Quartet, completed in 1945, stands as a successful blend of complexity and simplicity, of chromaticism, lyrical tunes, driving rhythms, diatonic harmonies and eloquent nostalgia. The latter penetrates the first movement's spiky exposition, where it emerges in the form of the cheerful second subject, which arrives like a genial visitor from the country, who gatecrashes an overheated meeting of metropolitan eggheads and plunges them into a state of teary-eyed reverie; Korngold soon shatters the *gemütlich* calm with an angry outburst and the fiery development section it signals. The pattern continues in the Scherzo, which opens with a dissonant *danse macabre* before dissolving into a Trio based on a radiant theme that Korngold had recently invented for the soundtrack to the fantasy drama *Between Two Worlds*. Yearning sentiment also rises with help from the interval of the major seventh, which the composer cherishes in all four movements. 'The echoes of Vienna and the coffee house, unavoidable for Korngold,' notes the musicologist Helmut Pöllmann, resound throughout the Third String Quartet. 'But while they are not deceptive, they are presented with almost tongue-in-cheek self-irony.'

Korngold retrieved the love theme, originally conceived for harmonica, from his score to the 1941 film *The Sea Wolf* and uses it as the foundation for his quartet's sublime slow movement, marked *sostenuto*. He adds the direction 'Like a folk tune', an apt description for a simple melody heavily dependent on rising fourths and soon graced by a countermelody of descending trills in the viola and cello.

The agitated central section, based on material from the first movement, magnifies the prevailing melancholy, before Korngold gently introduces a third theme, again folk-like in nature. An angular theme, announced in unison octaves, propels the rollicking finale; it yields to a second theme plucked from the score of the 1943 film *Devotion*, a fictionalised take on the lives of the Brontë sisters. While simple in form, the final Allegro encompasses elements from earlier movements – chromaticism from the first, motor rhythms from the second, the third's homophonic passages – all enlisted to create a joyful conclusion.

Beethoven returned to the string quartet medium in 1825 after a 12-year interval in response to a commission for three new works from Prince Nikolai Galitzin, a Russian aristocrat and amateur cellist then living in Vienna. So great were the riches uncovered during the creation of the Galitzin works, and so fired was Beethoven's imagination by the process, that he wrote two more quartets the following year. While the String Quartet No. 16 in F Op. 135 proved to be his last complete quartet, he wrote a substitute finale for the earlier Op. 130 quartet in September 1826; it appears that he was also working on a fragmentary sketch for a possible quartet in C major.

The four-movement structure and thematic concision of Op. 135 represent a turn from the more experimental, mould-breaking character of Beethoven's four other late quartets. And yet the work's embrace of simplicity belies its captivating range of expression and the cumulative power of its invention, which burns with fierce intensity in the rhythmic energy of the Scherzo and achieves the ideal union of visceral tragedy and divine comedy in the finale. The F major quartet begins with a near-throwaway idea, a fragment and an answering motif that vies with a portentous melody, first stated in unison octaves, components in a bustling conversation that occupies the movement's exposition and spills into its witty development section (complete with a 'false' recapitulation) and the recapitulation proper (which contains a fascinating excursion into further thematic development). The slow movement, Beethoven's last adventure in theme and variation form, inhabits a world if not fully at peace then certainly accepting of the fluctuating emotions of its four variations.

Beethoven prefaced the finale with an epigraph, a musical inscription bearing the movement's three opening notes and the underlying question 'Muss es sein?' ('Must it be?') and the incipit of the Allegro with the emphatic answer, 'Es muss sein!' ('It must be!'). This is preceded by an overarching title: 'Der schwer gefasste Entschluss' ('The Difficult Decision'). 'You see what an unfortunate fellow I am,' the composer wrote to the publisher Moritz Schlesinger, 'not only that [this work] was difficult to write because I was thinking of something else much bigger, but because I had promised it to you and needed money, and that it came hard you can gather from the "it must be".'

© Andrew Stewart 2025

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.