

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 4 March 2024  
7.30pm

## Wigmore Soloists

Michael Collins clarinet  
Adam Barnett-Hart violin  
Kristina Blaumane cello  
Michael McHale piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Trio in B flat Op. 11 for clarinet, cello and piano (1797)  
*I. Adagio • II. Allegro con brio • III. Tema: 'Prì a ch'io  
l'impegno'. Allegretto*

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor Op. 67 (1944)  
*I. Andante - Moderato • II. Allegro non troppo • III. Largo  
• IV. Allegretto*

*Interval*

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

Quatuor pour la fin du temps (1940-1)  
*I. Liturgie de cristal • II. Vocalise pour l'ange qui annonce  
la fin du temps • III. Abîme des oiseaux • IV. Intermède •  
V. Louange à l'éternité de Jésus • VI. Danse de la fureur,  
pour les sept trompettes • VII. Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel,  
pour l'ange qui annonce la fin du temps • VIII. Louange à  
l'immortalité de Jésus*

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**Beethoven** wrote his Trio in B flat Op. 11 for clarinet, cello and piano for the clarinetist Joseph Beer around 1797 and published it two years later. The work is notable for its spontaneity and charm. The opening movement begins with a unison statement of the first theme, before two chords and a transitional passage lead to the second theme played by the clarinet. The movement's development and recapitulation sections are concisely scored; Beethoven adds in a couple of false endings en route to the eventual conclusion. The middle movement begins with an expressive theme played by the cello. An upward scale on the cello also begins the second theme, which is answered by the clarinet. The development section has a more dramatic character, before the primary theme returns with ornamentations, prior to a restatement of the second theme and a brief coda. The closing movement is a set of nine variations based upon the aria 'Pria ch'io l'impegno' from Joseph Weigl's opera *L'Amor marinaro*; Beethoven's utilisation of it is witty and amusing.

In *Testimony*, the disputed memoirs assembled by Solomon Volkov, **Shostakovich** is reported to have said, 'I don't need brave words on music, just brave music.' His Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor Op. 67 is certainly that. Completed in 1944, the work grew out of both national and personal tragedy. Following years of brutal war, the German army was in retreat from Russia with the siege of Leningrad having recently ended. Dedicated to the writer Ivan Sollertinsky, Shostakovich's close friend who had recently died of a heart attack, the work follows in the tradition of elegiac Russian piano trios. Shostakovich's music though moves beyond individual memorial towards a sense of universal grief.

The opening movement begins with a fragment of a fugue played by the cello using high harmonics; the muted violin enters below and the piano follows with deep octaves. A sudden quickening of tempo heightens the anxiety further. The opening motif is tossed between the instruments with sudden climaxes before dying out uncertainly, just as one anticipates new developments. The second movement is savagely ironic and subverts the conventions of a playful scherzo with its biting discords and obsessive repetition. The violin desperately proclaims fragments of a folksong at the movement's centre. The third movement is a chaconne: the piano repeats a slow, stark sequence of chords eight times upon which five variations are produced. The violin and cello parts add to the desolation, which turns to impassioned anger. This subsides to an inconclusive chord which launches straight into the finale that brings together the moods of the earlier movements. To these it adds a grotesquely twisted klezmer, the wild music of Ashkenazi Jewish dance and ritual. After the last climax, the music breaks off and a swirling pattern based on the chaconne leads in to a reminiscence of

the first movement, bringing a sense of predestined structure. However, the chaconne's chords unite with the eerie harmonics of the opening bars to leaving the landscape as empty as it was at the start.

If the final movement of Shostakovich's Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor Op. 67 alludes to the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, **Messiaen's** *Quatour pour la fin du temps* was born from direct experience of them. Between 1940 and 1942, Messiaen was an inmate in the camp at Görlitz, near the Polish border. He turned to music to survive the 'cruelty and horrors of the camp'. Written on manuscript paper secreted from the guards, the work's unusual scoring was determined by the musicians and instruments available at the time. The work's première, before an audience of five thousand in Stalag VIII-A on 15 January 1941, featured the composer at the piano. 'Never was I listened to with such rapt attention and comprehension.' Messiaen stated that the brutal camp life made him dream of sound colours, which he tried to capture in his music. He was further sustained by his Catholic faith and focused on the words of the Angel of the Apocalypse in the Revelation of Saint John, 'There shall be time no longer'. Birdsong, Messiaen's lifelong emblem of divine joy, is woven throughout the tableau, as are, occasionally, the rhythms of the Hindu tala. Rhythm is seen not as the division of time, rather the duration of it.

The work is a set of eight movements. Movements one and two are for all four instruments. The first movement evokes, in Messiaen's words, the 'harmonious silence of heaven' as a bird improvises 'surrounded by fragments of sound. The piano plays a rhythmic ostinato on three Hindu rhythms, the clarinet spins out the birdsong'. The second movement is a *vocalise* for the Angel in three parts. The short outer parts describe the Angel's terrifying power, whilst the middle section evokes heavenly harmonies, with the piano playing cascades of chords, surrounded by plainchant melodies on the violin and cello. The third movement is a clarinet solo that moves from desolation to joy and back again: against the abyss of time birdsong represents 'our yearning for light'. The fourth movement, for violin, clarinet and cello, is an outgoing scherzo which melodically references other movements. The fifth, for cello and piano, praises Jesus and links him inextricably with the Word of God, through an intimate yet majestically awesome melody. The sixth movement is for all instruments, that 'in unison give the effect of gongs and trumpets'. The seventh movement, for cello and piano, finds ordered sounds yielding to a superhuman vortex of sounds and colours. The final movement, for violin and piano, counterpoints the fifth movement by presenting Jesus as the Word of God made flesh and the ascension of man towards God in paradise.

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