

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 4 May 2023
7.30pm

Silesian String Quartet

Szymon Krzeszowiec violin
Arkadiusz Kubica violin
Łukasz Syrnicki viola
Piotr Janosik cello

Stanisław Moniuszko (1819-1872)

String Quartet No. 1 in D minor (1839)

*I. Allegro agitato • II. Andantino •
III. Scherzo. Allegro moderato •
IV. Finale. 'Un ballo campestre e sue conseguenze'
Allegro assai*

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996)

String Quartet No. 17 Op. 146 (1986)

I. Allegro • II. Andantino • III. Allegro

Interval

Henryk Mikolaj Górecki (1933-2010)

String Quartet No. 3 ('...songs are sung') Op. 67 (1994-5)

*I. Adagio - Molto andante - Cantabile
II. Largo, cantabile
III. Allegro, sempre ben marcato
IV. Deciso - Espressivo ma ben tenuto
V. Largo - Tranquillo*

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

Friends of Wigmore Hall – celebrating 30 years of friendship

Over the past 30 years, Friends have been providing transformational support for the Hall, ensuring this historic building remains a home for great music making. Enjoy the benefits of friendship by joining as a Friend today, and be a part of the Wigmore story. Visit: wigmore-hall.org.uk/friends | Call: 020 7258 8230

FRIENDS OF
WIGMORE HALL

30

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**



The three works performed by the Silesian String Quartet this evening span more than a century and a half of quartet production by Polish composers, but the roots of this tradition go back even further. In 1839, **Moniuszko** – then still a student in Berlin – dedicated his first quartet to Józef Elsner (1769-1854), the pre-eminent Polish composer during the first few decades of the 19th Century. Though Elsner – like Moniuszko – devoted most of his energies to fostering a Polish operatic tradition, he still found the time to produce half a dozen string quartets, and so it was only natural that the younger composer should have seen Elsner as a role model. As Moniuszko wrote in the dedication to his D minor quartet: ‘To whom should I render homage, if not to the first founder of Polish music? Today I dare to prove my deepest esteem and respect for Elsner by offering him my quartet, not for its own modest worth but rather to draw attention to his own importance as a composer.’

Elsner was one of the first Polish composers to draw on the folk music tradition in his own works, and elements of this can also be heard in Moniuszko’s music. No identifiable folk melodies are quoted in his Quartet No. 1, but the third and fourth movements are clearly influenced by folk music. It is in these two movements that Moniuszko’s individual voice starts to emerge, for while the first two movements are skilfully written and show distinct promise, they still give the impression of having been produced by a rather earnest student of composition.

The deft *Scherzo* has a rhythmic vitality that sustains interest from start to finish, while the intriguing title of the *Finale* (whose Italian subtitle could be loosely translated as ‘A village ball and its aftermath’) leads one to wonder if it was perhaps inspired by a scene witnessed by the composer, much of whose childhood was spent on his family’s country estate. A recurring syncopated episode suggests that the *Krakowiak* folk dance could also have provided the inspiration for this movement.

In contrast to Moniuszko, who abandoned the string quartet in favour of opera after two youthful essays in the genre, **Weinberg** produced an impressive body of quartets throughout a long composing career. Weinberg’s first quartet dates from 1937, when he was still in his teens and a student at the Warsaw Conservatoire; his seventeenth and last quartet appeared half a century later, by which time he was a much-respected figure on the Moscow musical scene. He had fled Nazi-occupied Poland for the relative safety of the Soviet Union in 1939, and there he remained for the rest of his life, becoming close friends with Shostakovich, who held him in high regard and generously helped to promote his career and to protect him from the often unwelcome attention of the Soviet authorities. Weinberg composed prolifically in all genres, even outdoing his

mentor in his output of string quartets and symphonies (he wrote two more quartets than Shostakovich, while in the field of the symphony he produced a staggering 26 – far outstripping the older composer’s mere 15).

It was through Shostakovich that Weinberg got to know various other luminaries of Soviet musical life, including the Borodin Quartet, whom he first met a few years after he settled in Moscow in 1943. Six of his string quartets were given their first performances by the Borodin Quartet, and his Quartet No. 17 was also written for this ensemble and was originally intended to mark the 40th anniversary of its formation. However, in the event the work had to wait more than 20 years for its première, which was finally given by the Quatuor Danel in 2009.

Whatever the reason may have been for the Borodin Quartet’s failure to give the first performance of Weinberg’s last quartet, it’s tempting to think that the predominantly playful tone of the work (which exudes a positivity that’s comparatively rare in the composer’s chamber music) was inspired by his decades-long friendship and fruitful partnership with the group.

Górecki’s Quartet No. 3 was also a product of its composer’s long-standing association with a particular group of performers – in this case, the Kronos Quartet. It too took a long time to see the light of day. Górecki wrote his first two quartets for the Kronos in quick succession, in 1988 and 1990-1. After performing and recording Nos. 1 and 2, the ensemble asked the composer for a third. Górecki agreed, and the world première of the work was scheduled to be given at Carnegie Hall in 1994. But the promised new quartet failed to materialise.

It was not until 2005 that Górecki finally despatched his Quartet No. 3, complete with the dedication ‘To the Kronos Quartet, which for so many years has waited patiently for this quartet.’ Mysteriously, he added in a note attached to the score that the work had been completed in 1995, ‘but I continued to hold back from releasing it to the world. I don’t know why.’

The quartet’s equally enigmatic subtitle is taken from a poem by the Russian Futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922), whose brief poem ‘When horses die’ ends with the line ‘When people die, they sing songs’. Górecki insisted that Khlebnikov’s verse served merely as a creative trigger and that the music was not intended to illustrate the imagery of the literary text. However, it is surely not going too far to see the quartet as a reflection on the nature of existence and what it means to be truly human.

© Paula Kennedy 2023

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.