

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 6 March 2025
7.30pm

Quatuor Danel

Marc Danel violin
Gilles Millet violin
Vlad Bogdanas viola
Yovan Markovitch cello
François-Frédéric Guy piano

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996)

String Quartet No. 13 Op. 118 (1977)

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No. 13 in B flat minor Op. 138 (1970)
Adagio - Doppio movimento - Tempo primo

Interval

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Piano Quintet in G minor Op. 57 (1940)
*I. Prelude. Lento • II. Fugue. Adagio • III. Scherzo.
Allegretto • IV. Intermezzo. Lento • V. Finale.
Allegretto*



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In the seven years between his Twelfth and Thirteenth Quartets, **Weinberg** turned to focus on opera, a genre that would become vital to his output. His Thirteenth Quartet is one of the most enigmatic of his cycle, though still with heavy influence from Shostakovich. Both composers' Thirteenth Quartets are set in a single movement; while **Shostakovich's** has a Bartók-style arch structure, Weinberg's is more like an extended sonata form, à la Liszt's B Minor sonata. It is the shortest of Weinberg's quartets.

From the opening of the work, there is a sense of 'wandering'; the first violin opens with a searching line with sparse accompaniment. The initial gesture is slowly passed around the ensemble, and energy slowly accrues as it is given in a shortened form. The second section gains further energy with a melodic line that emphasises the oscillating fourth, a signature motive of Weinberg's late style. The cello at first accompanies this with a series of chords and eerie harmonics before the fourth's theme is again shared around the ensemble. The regular quaver rhythm eventually takes the role of a pulsing point of reference, increasing in both energy and implied violence. The third section introduces a 'scotch snap' rhythmic motif (short-to-long), but this then gives way to a reprise of the opening. A quintuplet rhythm interrupts and then dominates the remainder of the work. Some of the most striking material comes here, with a distinctive 'smearing' gesture of chromatic material played unison. The finale is the most dissonant section of the work, with grating semiquaver accompaniment. The work ends with a closing section around the 'smearing' gesture – now cadencing into a warm chord of D flat. Weinberg's Thirteenth Quartet was dedicated to the Borodin Quartet, but no record exists for its first performance.

Shostakovich's Thirteenth Quartet has a prominent part for the viola, based on its dedication to Vadim Borisovsky, violist of the Beethoven Quartet. Shostakovich wrote the work while in-and-out of various hospitals in 1969 and 1970, mostly for treatment for ailing strength in his right hand (since diagnosed as a form of motor-neurone disease). He wrote his film score for Grigori Kozintsev's adaptation of *King Lear* at the same time, from which he borrowed a 'lamentation', used as the opening and conclusion of the Thirteenth Quartet.

The opening Adagio introduces a 12-note theme (itself a spin on the musical notes found in Borisovsky's name), and then leads into the 'lamentation' theme. The central section features extraordinary contrasts, with some of the greatest dynamic extremes heard anywhere in his quartet cycle. There are passages of 'pointillist' writing, with short spiky rhythms and Shostakovich's characteristic anapaest rhythm (short-short-long). The middle section opens with a dance-like theme in the viola that is accompanied by the viola tapping the body of their instrument with the end of the bow in an eerie knocking. The tapping continues as the theme changes into a jazz-like walking bass line, itself giving way to even greater aggression; Eugene Drucker of the Emerson Quartet called this central section 'a jam session from hell'.

Shostakovich concludes the work with a reprise of the opening and lamentation, though now considerably darkened, perhaps a response to the central section's aggression. The viola's role only increases, almost elevated to the position of 'concerto soloist'. The work concludes with an extraordinary passage: the viola rises to a high B-flat, straining at the very limits of the instrument's range, and it is joined there by both violins at *ffff* dynamic – and then abruptly cutting off.

An extraordinary diary exists of the Thirteenth Quartet in rehearsal, attended by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears in Moscow; Pears dubbed it a work of 'great intensity and touching beauty [...] we were deeply moved'.

Shostakovich's degenerative hand condition greatly affected his piano-playing; his Piano Quintet of 1940 is testament to his previous performance abilities. He supposedly wrote the work as an attempt to secure an invitation to join the Beethoven Quartet on their various travels for concert tours.

The Quintet is set in five movements, with two pairs of interrelated movements each book-ending a central Scherzo (a structure not dissimilar to Mahler's Fifth Symphony, and also Sergei Taneyev's own Piano Quintet). The opening 'Prelude' is neo-Baroque in tone, with a monumental-style piano introduction before the strings enter. There are parallels to Bach's music here, with a sense of 'spinning-out' and exploring the overall tonality of G minor. The second movement continues on Baroque lines, with a long Fugue; it builds up tension only to abandon the strict fugal texture in favour of highly-expressive chordal passages.

The central Scherzo is the dazzling heart of the Quintet, with multiple dance-like themes and some demanding passagework in the piano. It abruptly shifts us into B major and is all the more jarring for it. It is a stunning centre-piece for the work and is often performed as a standalone movement.

The 'Intermezzo' returns to the Baroque influence and the minor key, with its opening that suggests a *passacaglia*. There are quotations from Henry Purcell, and also Grieg's *Holberg Suite* (itself a neo-Baroque work). The Quintet concludes with a light-hearted 'finale', with echoes of Shostakovich's First Quartet. The final pages are, however, a stark juxtaposition, as some of the previous gloom seems to infect the positive theme – only to be ignored.

The Quintet was quickly viewed as a hit, even diverting Shostakovich's attention from writing other works. It won the Stalin Prize, the pinnacle of achievement in the Soviet Arts. It was immensely popular with audiences, too: one joke went that the Quintet was a 'five-movement work set in seven movements', as it was so common for audiences to ask for several encores.

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