

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 7 January 2024  
7.30pm

## Wigmore Soloists

Michael Collins clarinet  
Sini Simonen violin  
Isabelle van Keulen violin, viola  
Rachel Roberts viola  
Kristina Blaumane cello  
Alberto Menéndez Escribano horn

Daniel Lehardt piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Horn Quintet in E flat K407 (1782)

*I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Rondo. Allegro*

Clarinet Quintet in A K581 (1789)

*I. Allegro • II. Larghetto •*

*III. Menuetto • IV. Allegretto con variazioni*

Interval

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Quintet in F minor Op. 34 (1862, rev. 1864)

*I. Allegro non troppo*

*II. Andante, un poco adagio*

*III. Scherzo. Allegro*

*IV. Finale. Poco sostenuto - Allegro non troppo*

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The works by **Mozart** in the first half of tonight's concert were written for two of the leading wind players of his day. Like his series of horn concertos, the Quintet K407 was intended for Joseph Leutgeb, who was a long-standing family friend, and the butt of Mozart's sometimes scurrilous humour; he had known him since childhood, and in his last surviving letter, written in October 1791, he mentions that the two of them are having dinner together.

A striking feature of the Horn Quintet K407 is its unconventional scoring: in place of a normal string quartet, Mozart opts for an ensemble in which a single violin is outnumbered by a pair of violas, their sound casting a characteristically mellow glow over the work as a whole. Mozart takes advantage of this darkened sonority almost immediately, with a turn to the minor introducing a melancholy new theme given out by the horn over an accompaniment which omits the violin, and has the violas playing at the bottom of their range.

The slow movement's opening theme is remarkably similar to that of the following *Rondo* – the one being little more than an accelerated form of the other. The *Rondo* contains some of Mozart's most brilliant horn writing, and it brings the work to an end in fitting virtuoso style.

On 20 February 1788 the clarinetist Anton Stadler gave a benefit concert at Vienna's Burgtheater. The instrument he used on that occasion was a 'bass clarinet' constructed by Theodor Lotz, the instrument maker attached to the Viennese Court and the probable inventor of the basset horn. Lotz's bass clarinet (or basset clarinet, as it is now called) extended the normal instrument's lower range by four semitones, and Mozart almost certainly wrote both his clarinet quintet and the concerto in the same key of A major (K622) for it. Alas, his autograph scores are lost, and when the works were published after his death they appeared in an edition that altered the wind part to fit the compass of the standard clarinet. Nowadays, many players, including Michael Collins, use an instrument with an extended range, and reconstruct what Mozart must have written in those passages where the familiar clarinet part doubles back on itself, rather than following a plain ascent or descent: the ending of each half of the second trio in the minuet movement, for instance; or the start of the fourth variation in the finale.

The quintet largely shares the relaxed melodic style of the three 'Prussian' string quartets Mozart had begun writing shortly before it, particularly in such moments as the opening theme's continuation, where the long, sinuous clarinet melody is taken over by the cello; or the undulating second subject, with its leisurely pizzicato cello accompaniment. Mozart even takes a step towards the old-fashioned divertimento form by having a minuet with two trios: the first, in the minor, scored for the string quartet alone (giving the clarinetist a well-earned rest); and the second in Ländler style.

Following the serene slow movement with its seemingly endless clarinet melody unfolding to the accompaniment of muted strings, and the minuet, Mozart casts the finale as a set of variations on a perky gavotte-like theme. His use of variation form to round the work off was mirrored by Brahms and Reger, in the two most important clarinet quintets written since.

In the autumn of 1862 **Brahms** sent Clara Schumann the first three movements of a string quintet with two cellos - the same ensemble Schubert used for his great C major Quintet D956. Not long afterwards he was able to submit the complete work to his other chief musical advisor, Joseph Joachim. Joachim was at first full of praise, but by April 1863, having played through the work several times, he had serious doubts about the effectiveness of its scoring; and the following year Brahms rewrote it in a radically different form, as a sonata for two pianos. When Clara Schumann played through the two-piano version with the conductor Hermann Levi she told Brahms, 'it is not a sonata, rather a work whose ideas you could – and should – distribute among the whole orchestra, as though out of a horn of plenty!'

This time, Brahms responded by rewriting the piece not for orchestra, but for piano quintet – as though attempting to find an ideal amalgam of his two previous versions. This final scoring is generally considered as being definitive, but Brahms always regarded the two-piano sonata as equally viable.

The quintet's beginning, with subdued bare octaves followed by a dramatic outburst of semiquavers, recalls the opening bars of Beethoven's 'Appassionata' Sonata Op. 57, in the same dark key of F minor. Moreover, like Beethoven, Brahms later fuses his development section and recapitulation in an uninterrupted flow. So continuous is this moment in the Brahms that the true recapitulation appears to begin only with the explosive return of the semiquavers.

The slow movement's smooth main melody eventually gives way to a middle section setting out in a brighter key, and presenting a more energetic theme with an initial ascending leap of an octave. The reprise of the opening section finds the octave leap incorporated into the theme's accompaniment.

The *Scherzo*, which is not in the home key but in C minor, is followed by the most sombre portion of the work: a slow introduction to the *Finale* whose tortuously chromatic phrases only gradually acquire a more diatonic aspect, so that the music may lead seamlessly into the uncomplicated theme of the *Allegro* itself. Towards the end, the music appears to be heading for a resigned conclusion, before a much quicker coda based on a rhythmic transformation of the rondo theme brings it to a headlong finish.

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