

# WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 9 July 2022 11.30am

Haydn Day

**Roman Rabinovich** piano

## Heath Quartet

**Sara Wolstenholme** violin

**Benjamin Gilmore** violin

**Gary Pomeroy** viola

**Christopher Murray** cello



Supported by the Sir Jack Lyons Charitable Trust

**Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in C minor HXVI/20 (1771)

*I. Moderato • II. Andante con moto • III. Finale. Allegro*

String Quartet in F minor Op. 20 No. 5 (1772)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Menuetto • III. Adagio • IV. Fuga a 2 soggetti*

Piano Trio in F sharp minor HXV/26 (1795)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio cantabile • III. Finale. Tempo di menuetto*



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In the late 1760s and early 1770s Haydn's music underwent a stylistic upheaval. One notable symptom of this so-called *Sturm und Drang* (or 'Storm and Stress') period was that Haydn concentrated to a much greater degree than at any other time on minor keys. All three of the works in this morning's concert are in the minor, and each ends bleakly, without a final resolution in the major. It's true that the Piano Trio HXV/26 belongs to a much later period, but it, too, seems imbued with the same tragic atmosphere.

Haydn's sonatas were written for domestic performance by amateur players, the large majority of them women. Judging from the music's technical demands, many of them must have been remarkable pianists - in particular, the sisters Katharina and Marianna von Auenbrugger, to whom Haydn dedicated the set of six sonatas that includes the Sonata in C minor HXVI/20. The instrument for which he composed his mature sonatas was not the still ubiquitous harpsichord, but the relatively new-fangled piano. Haydn set great store by its expressive qualities, and the Sonata in C minor was his first to contain dynamic markings, though they were almost certainly added at the time the work was published, nearly a decade after it was written. Its opening movement, with its fragmentary melodic style and its sudden *adagio* interventions, shows Haydn's style at its boldest and most forward-looking. The slow movement, on the other hand, casts more than a passing glance towards the past: the 'running' bass line in regular quavers that pauses only for the last two bars of each half has unmistakable roots in the early 18th Century.

Perhaps the finest of the three movements is the *Finale*; and the astonishing outburst in its recapitulation - a crossed-hands passage of explosive violence - was to find no parallel in Haydn's piano music for many years to come. Since the recapitulation up to that point has been greatly compressed, the music appears to progress in a single uninterrupted sweep right through to its bleak conclusion.

With Haydn's six quartets Op. 20, of 1772, the string quartet came of age. Haydn was in his 40th year, and they were his first masterpieces in the genre, and the earliest to have earned a permanent place in the quartet repertoire. Three of them have a finale in the form of a fugue, and when the composer drew up his own catalogue of works many years later, he placed these works at the head of the series, in order of the number of subjects on which the fugue was based. Thus, the F minor Quartet Op. 20 No. 5 came first, followed by the A major Op. 20 No. 6 with its triple fugue, and the C major Op. 20 No. 2, ending with a *Fuga a IV soggetti*. Each fugue, moreover, is played *sotto voce*: Haydn was well aware that having the music performed quietly was the best means of ensuring the players could hear each other without difficulty in such intricate textures.

None of Haydn's string quartets has a more melancholy opening movement than Op. 20 No. 5. Its opening violin melody could have

stepped straight out of an *opera seria*, and the repeated-note accompaniment interjected by the three lower instruments seems openly to sob. The movement's coda leads through a labyrinth of distant keys, before the music dies away, its tragedy unresolved.

The quartet's two major-mode portions - the trio of the minuet and the siciliano-like slow movement - offer gentle consolation before the arrival of the austere closing fugue. The approach to the reprise of the slow movement's main theme bears the curious inscription '*per figurem retardationis*', indicating that the violin's intricately ornamented part constantly lags behind the harmony of the accompaniment from the remaining layers.

Among the works Haydn wrote in the summer of 1795, before he left England for the last time, was a set of three piano trios dedicated to the widow of Johann Samuel Schroeter, who in 1782 had succeeded JC Bach as 'Master of the King's Music'. The most famous of Mrs Schroeter's trios is the G major middle work, with its spectacular Gypsy-style finale; but more profound is the last work of the group, HXIV/26. It is the last of Haydn's three great works in the unusual key of F sharp minor, following the 'Farewell' Symphony No. 45 and the String Quartet Op. 50 No. 4.

Its opening theme owes its peculiarly plangent character to the striking dissonance presented in its very first bar, where an accented melodic *appoggiatura* (literally, a 'leaning' note) on the note E in the pianist's right hand clashes with the harmonic E sharp in the left. But after only eight bars the music moves into the major for a new theme that clearly grows out of the opening subject; and towards the end of the exposition Haydn also throws in one of those staccato tunes in popular style that are such a hallmark of the music he composed in London.

The radiant middle movement, transposed down a semitone into the less fearsome key of F major, also served Haydn as the slow movement of his 'London' Symphony No. 102; and so convincing do both versions sound that we cannot be sure which is the original, and which the arrangement. In both pieces, the transition to the recapitulation is a moment of spellbinding beauty: a single *pianissimo* line gradually joined by others fanning chromatically outwards in both directions, to form a series of grinding dissonances that finally resolves into the resplendent return of the main subject.

The *Finale* is a melancholy minuet, whose melody once again begins on an acute discord. The turn to the major for the central episode serves only to heighten the music's poignancy, its new-found radiance heightened by a sonority that has the piano's melody doubled by the violin.

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