

# Heath Quartet

Saturday 4 August 2018 ~ 7.30pm

## **Jorg Widmann**

String Quartet No. 4

## **Benjamin Britten**

String Quartet No. 2 in C major, Op. 36

1. Allegro calmo, senza rigore
2. Vivace
3. Chacony: sostenuto

INTERVAL

## **Beethoven**

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132

1. Assai sostenuto – Allegro
2. Allegro ma non tanto
3. Molto adagio (Heiliger Dankgesang...) – Andante
4. Alla marcia, assai vivace (attacca)
5. Allegro appassionato

# Programme Notes

## Jorg Widmann String Quartet No. 4

"My existing five string quartets are based on a cyclic concept and can be performed singly or as a complete whole. Each quartet represents an archetypal movement form. The 1st Quartet forms the introduction and the 2nd (Choral-) Quartet is a largo which tests the limits of statics; the 3rd (Jagd-) Quartet corresponds to a classical if somewhat ferocious scherzo in which the hunting rhythm is hunted to death. The 4th Quartet investigates forms of walking and steps (Andante/Passacaglia) and the 5th Quartet with soprano is subtitled Attempt at a Fugue.

An examination of the score of the 4th String Quartet gives the impression of a concentrated and compact work. The density of information contained in each instrumental part is extremely high, as a variety of playing techniques must be performed simultaneously with the left and right hands and each performer additionally performs an individual "breathing score." Nevertheless, the gesture of this quartet is extremely light; it is a work concerned with walking (Andante) and steps (Passacaglia in the original sense as a "stepping dance"). Pizzicati in all differentiations and levels pervade the entire work. A clear A-B-A form is coupled with a complex interleaved form in which inlays are superimposed on one another. This is perhaps ultimately an attempt to achieve a balance between complexity and simplicity."

*Jorg Widmann*

*Translation: Lindsay Chalmers-Gerbracht*

**Britten's** Second Quartet dates from 1945, the year of the hugely successful premiere of *Peter Grimes*. In a letter that he wrote to a great patron of the arts, Mary Behrend, on the day that he completed that opera, he stated that he'd had an idea for a quartet in his mind for some time, an assertion that explains how he was able to complete this piece with such speed; within one month in fact. Like Schumann and Schoenberg, once a

concept for a piece was formulated in Britten's mind, the actual composition was very quick. Instead of a conventional Sonata form, the first movement uses three themes that are developed independently of each other and only coincide towards the close. The brief and highly virtuosic second movement makes way for the *Chacony*, a vast homage to Purcell. A ground bass is followed by twenty two variations which are interspersed by cadenzas for cello, viola and first violin respectively. It is a monumental movement, eminently fitting for the occasion of the 250th anniversary of Purcell's death.

*by Tim Horton*

Grouping **Beethoven's** quartets into early (Op. 18), middle (Opp. 59, 74 and 95) and late (Opp. 127, 130-2 and 135) risks obscuring the dissimilarities between different works within the same period. In the late quartets, Op. 127 and 135 are predominantly lyrical, while Op. 132, 130 and 131 (the actual order of composition) pursue more varied agendas. Furthermore the late quartets, and especially the A minor, display within themselves unprecedented, sometimes dizzying, stylistic contrasts.

In late 1822 Beethoven's Russian patron Prince Nikolay Golitsyn, a keen amateur cellist, wrote from St. Petersburg requesting "two or three" quartets, although unlike his compatriot Count Razumovsky, Galitsyn made no request to include Russian themes. In fact the first quartet, Op. 127, wasn't completed until February 1825 and progress on a second quartet was halted when in April 1825 Beethoven succumbed to an illness often to beset him in later years, characterised by acute abdominal pain, aching joints and poor eyesight. His doctor forbade coffee, wine and spices, and Beethoven withdrew to recuperate in the Viennese suburb of Baden where Op. 132 was composed over the next few months. Recovery resulted in a semi-programmatic slow movement - the centrepiece of the whole work. The Schuppanzigh Quartet gave the first performance in Vienna that September.

The quartet's opening page, riven with striking contrasts, sets the tone for the quartet as a whole. The cello's opening four-note cantus firmus is answered by a feverish violin run, suddenly hushed to allow the cello to announce its arch-like theme. The *Allegro* sets these two contrasting ideas against each other in a titanic struggle that is never resolved. Another more lyrical, nostalgic theme, heard three times in the movement but never developed, throws the contest into greater relief. Fever subsides quickly, though, in the *Allegro ma non tanto*. Though not without contrapuntal complexity it has a straight-up-and-down character, while the central section comes further down to earth, recalling Haydn's many depictions of peasant merry-making as well as Beethoven's own in the "Pastoral" Symphony.

Beethoven entitled his third movement "*Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart*" – A Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Godhead from a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode. The first thirty-one bars possess a beauty arguably never surpassed. Over a contrasting section appear the words "*Neue Kraft Fühlend*", "Feeling new strength". In fact the movement turns out to have an ABABA structure, as the visions of future recovery alternate with votive gratitude for deliverance. The use of the Lydian mode was a deliberate archaism; he had used the Dorian mode in the *Missa solemnis* the previous year; also in the finale of the Ninth Symphony. Beethoven was very much in tune with the contemporary fashion for mediaeval Catholicism among German Romantic poets, while a Palestrina revival was in the offing among music scholars. In Joseph Kerman's words "the Lydian hymn summons up some infinitely remote liturgy, a ritual music of romance that tenuously looks ahead to Wagner's *Parsifal* and Fauré's *Requiem*. In 1833 it was surely echoed by the chorus of pilgrims in the slow movement of Mendelssohn's 'Italian' *Symphony No. 4* (like the quartet in the key of A).

Two surprises lie in wait in the *Alla marcia*, a chipper, comic little march that survives less than two minutes before being "ambushed" by the equivalent of the "O Freunde, nicht diese Töne . . ." episode in the Choral Symphony, a piece of stirring recitative thrusting aside what has gone before. The ensuing tune of the *Allegro appassionato* is not nearly as

"big" as in the Symphony, but Beethoven's sketches suggest that he had considered it for that very role. Indeed this long rondo finale - sad, wistful, fraught, frenetic - is anything but triumphant. The stress and strain is nowhere more apparent than in the concluding presto where the cello plays, unusually, in the treble clef right at the top of its range. There is no victory over fate here, as there is elsewhere. Consequently Op. 132 remains, for many, Beethoven's tensest and most emotionally demanding quartet.

*Notes by Malcolm Chapman*

## Musicians

### Heath Quartet

**Oliver Heath** violin

**Sara Wolstenholme** violin

**Gary Pomeroy** viola

**Christopher Murray** cello



The dynamic and charismatic **Heath Quartet** are fast earning a reputation as one of the most exciting British chamber ensembles of the moment. In May 2013 they became the first ensemble in 15 years to win the prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artists Award. Formed in 2002 at the Royal Northern College of Music they were selected for representation by YCAT, were awarded a Borletti-Buitoni Special Ensemble Scholarship and in 2012 won Ensemble Prize at the Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Their recording of Tippett's string quartets (Wigmore Live) received widespread acclaim and won the

2016 GRAMOPHONE Chamber Disk of the Year. A subsequent release on Harmonia Mundi of Tchaikovsky: Quartets 1 & 3 was selected as Disk of the Week by both The Sunday Times and BBC Radio 3. The Quartet's complete Bartók cycle (recorded live at Wigmore Hall) was released by Harmonia Mundi in June 2017.

Highlights of the 17/18 season include a five-concert series at Wigmore Hall featuring Jörg Widmann's quartets, as well as further Widmann cycles at the Boulez Saal and Kilkenny Festival, a tour of the US including debuts in Chicago and Los Angeles, and recitals in Belgium and The Netherlands with Hannes Minnaar. They will record the Enescu and Mendelssohn octets, give the premiere of a new work by Helen Grime, and undertake a 2 week tour of New Zealand. The Quartet will be on-stage cast members in Calixto Bieito's play adaptation of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, with performances in Birmingham, Brighton, Luxembourg, Bilbao and Amsterdam.

Notable performances of previous seasons have included a complete Beethoven Cycle at Kilkenny Festival, a John Tavener premiere at the BBC Proms, concerts at the Beethovenfest Bonn, Mecklenburgh-Vorpommern Festival, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam and their debuts at the Musée d'Orsay and Louvre Auditorium in Paris. Regular visitors to the US, the quartet also recently made their debut in New York at both Carnegie Hall and the Lincoln Center, and continue their residence at Middlebury College, Vermont.

The Heath Quartet regularly enjoy working with a host of talented collaborators including Anna Caterina Antonacci, James Baillieu, Ian Bostridge, Adrian Brendel, Michael Collins, Colin Currie, Stephen Hough, Richard Lester, Aleksandar Madzar, Anthony Marwood, Hannes Minnaar, Mark Padmore, Lawrence Power, Carolyn Sampson, plus even venturing into the world of jazz with a 'Wigmore Late' concert together with saxophonist Trish Clowes and pianist Gwilym Simcock.

The Heath Quartet are members of faculty at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.



## HISTORY

Founded in 1995 by Adrian Brendel, Plush Festival is a summer concert series of classical and contemporary music run by the Brendel family.

Musicians visit Plush from around the world to perform solo and ensemble works, with the platform given to both new formations and established groups. Programmes span a diverse repertoire; from Bach cantatas and Beethoven quartets to lesser known classical and Romantic works and modern discoveries. Contemporary composers such as Oliver Knussen, Harrison Birtwistle and Thomas Adès regularly feature, alongside jazz, improvisation, folk and song recitals.

The annual Young Musicians Workshop connects aspiring students in Dorset with visiting musicians for an inspirational day of music-making.

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