

J&P MUSIC BUILDING

Saturday 10 June 2017, 7.30pm

Heath Quartet



St Hilda's College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Heath Quartet

Jacqueline du Pré Music Building
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Joseph Haydn
(1733-1809)

String Quartet in B minor, Op. 33 No. 1

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Scherzo: Allegro di molto
- III. Andante
- IV. Finale: Presto

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

Quartet No. 6 in F minor, Op. 80

- I. Allegro vivace assai
- II. Allegro assai,
- III. Adagio
- IV. Finale: Presto

INTERVAL

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

String Quartet in F major, Op. 59, No. 1 'The Russian'

- I. Allegro
- II. Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando
- III. Adagio molto e mesto
- IV. Thème Russe (Allegro)

Joseph Haydn (1733-1809)

String Quartet in B minor, Op. 33, No. 1

1. Allegro moderato
2. Scherzo: Allegro di molto
3. Andante
4. Finale: Presto

In Haydn's hands, the string quartet is the genre of conversation, especially in his works from Op. 33 onwards. The conversation metaphor encompasses intellectual dialogue between the composer and the musicians – as they study and unravel the score – as well as a physical conversation between the instruments themselves. As Mary Hunter has written in the *Cambridge Companion to Haydn*, eighteenth and early nineteenth-century commentators and critics liked to personify the instruments of the quartet, citing in particular:

‘Giuseppe Carpani, an early Haydn biographer, [who] heard in his quartets a first violin who was a spirited and likable middle-aged man; a second violin who was his friend and whose main function was to keep the conversation going, rarely drawing attention to himself; a learned and sententious cello who often lent gravity to the utterances of the first violin; and a viola figured as a charming but chattering woman with nothing important to say, who could at least occasionally let the others draw breath.’

In the ideally conversational string quartet of the Enlightenment, no single instrument would dominate the texture melodically, or disport itself in an excessively virtuosic manner. Handel's Op. 33 String Quartets, composed c. 1781 have established themselves as the first true realisation of the ideal. Although the first violin takes the lion's share of melodic material, Haydn spread an equality of musical riches across the other three parts, making each of these voices essential to the texture. To remove one note of the viola, second violin, or cello parts would open a discursive abyss in the Quartet's musical fabric.

Haydn's choice of B minor for the first quartet of the Op. 33 collection set a challenging precedent, demonstrating through the use of a serious key (in the words of an early nineteenth-century theorist, B minor is 'the key of patience, of calm awaiting one's fate, and of submission to divine dispensation') his profound intent. However, he fools everybody by beginning the piece with a theme in D major – B minor itself arrives a few bars later. Haydn advertised that he had composed his Op. 33 quartets in a 'new and special way', referring to the inclusion of a scherzo and trio, rather than minuet and trio. In this Quartet, the scherzo begins in B minor with a bold gesture outlining the tonic and dominant harmonies. Its humour and drama comes from sudden dynamic changes and insinuating entanglement of the instrumental lines.

The often ecstatic lyricism of the *Andante* reminds us of Haydn's remarks, captured in Griesinger's biography:

'His theoretical reasonings were very simple: a piece of music should have a flowing melody [*Gesang*], coherent ideas, no superfluous ornaments [*Schnörkeleyen*], nothing overdone, no confusing accompaniment, and so forth. How to satisfy these requirements? That, he confessed himself, cannot be learned by rule, and simply depends on natural talent and on the inspiration of inborn genius.'

Inspiration fuels the riotous drama of the finale, with a mood more combative than conversational. The *Presto* presents many examples of volatile dialogue between the instruments, exemplified by the fiery semiquaver exchanges between the violins. During the wilder sorties by the first violin, its colleagues alternately goad or placate; Haydn maintains near-constant quaver motion throughout the finale, fitting together a complex counterpoint. Within these patterns, much of the impetus comes from the interactions of viola and cello. The elements of *Sturm und Drang* so overt in this finale (and throughout the Quartet) must have intrigued and challenged the musicians – amateur and professional – of Vienna after Artaria published Op. 33: this sense of astonishment and wonder still prevails today.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809 1847) **Quartet No. 6 in F minor, Op. 80**

1. *Allegro vivace assai*
2. *Allegro assai*,
3. *Adagio*
4. *Finale: Allegro molto*

The years 1846 and 1847 were two of the busiest of Mendelssohn's life. In addition to his responsibilities with the Gewandhaus Orchestra, he also had many commissions to fill, including one to write an oratorio for the Birmingham Festival in 1846. The composition of the oratorio *Elijah* occupied almost all of Mendelssohn's compositional energy: he finished only just in time for the parts to be prepared, before travelling to England to begin rehearsals for its Festival performance on 26 August. Meanwhile, Mendelssohn was planning concerts back in Germany, to begin as soon as he returned there in September. He was back in London in April 1847 to direct four performances of a revised *Elijah* in London – some of which were attended by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert – as well as additional performances of the oratorio in Birmingham and Manchester, and other orchestral concerts. The hectic activity exhausted Mendelssohn, who returned to Germany only to discover that his sister Fanny Hensel had died on 14 May. Mendelssohn's terrible distress rendered him unable to compose, but during his much-needed summer holiday in Switzerland (where he also did a lot of painting), he wrote one of his final complete pieces, the String Quartet in F minor.

After his first encounters with Queen Victoria in 1842, the monarch recorded the event in her journal, referring to Mendelssohn as ‘A wonderful genius . . . so pleasing and amiable’, but amiability found in his F minor Quartet. Mendelssohn’s minor-key chamber pieces tend often towards the dark and turbulent (the Piano Trio in C minor, for example), but in the F minor Quartet – arguably one of his most profound pieces – the darkness, tension, and turbulence are extreme. Full of sudden changes of dynamic, and many *sforzando* markings, the Quartet gives voice to Mendelssohn’s terrible desolation after his sister’s death. The piece also breaks with tradition by having an *Allegro* assai second movement, and *Adagio* third movement, omitting the customary *scherzo*. After the recuperative summer in Switzerland, Mendelssohn returning to Leipzig in September, but his sister’s death had obviously weakened him, and after being almost incapacitated by a series of strokes at the end of October, Mendelssohn himself died on 4 November at the age of 38.

INTERVAL

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet in F major, Op. 59, No. I ‘The Russian’

1. *Allegro*
2. *Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando*
3. *Adagio molto e mesto*
4. *Thème Russe (Allegro)*

Count Andreas Kyrillovitch Rasumovsky embarked upon a naval career before becoming a diplomat; he served as Ambassador at Vienna from 1792, having already held posts at Venice, Naples, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. An avid art collector as well as an amateur musician, Rasumovsky lived in a state of opulence extraordinary even for a diplomat in Imperial Vienna. In late 1805 he commissioned Beethoven to write the three string quartets now known as the ‘Rasumovsky’ Quartets, and on 26 May 1806, Beethoven began writing out the Quartet in F major, which he completed in about a month. He probably finished the whole set by November after an eventful summer and autumn: in August he went to Grätz, to stay in the castle belonging to his patron Prince Lichnowsky, but in October there was a disagreement, and Beethoven returned to Vienna. During this journey some of the sketches for the ‘Rasumovsky’ Quartets suffered damaged in a tremendous rainstorm.

In the five years between the completion of his Opus 18 quartets, and the completion of Op. 59, Beethoven entered the phase of his musical life now called the ‘Eroica’ period, and the immense scale of the first Rasumovsky Quartet attests to a new direction. Most significant (without any implication that Opus 18 is an inferior body of work) is the breadth of expression inherent in the Quartet; it occupies a world ‘fantastically remote’ from that of Op. 18, just as the ‘Eroica’ Symphony exists

on a different plane from its antecedents. When the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* announced the 'Rasumovsky' Quartets on 27 February 1807, the announcement read,

'Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven string quartets, dedicated to the Russian Ambassador, Count Razumovsky, are also attracting the attention of all connoisseurs. The conception is profound and the construction excellent, but they are not easily comprehended - with the possible exception of the 3rd in C Major, which cannot but appeal to intelligent lovers of music because of its originality, melody, and harmonic power.'

The first performers of the Quartet in F major – a group led by Ignaz Schuppanzigh – were immediately confounded by the difficulty of the piece; Carl Czerny reported that 'when Schuppanzigh first played the Razumovsky Quartet in F they laughed and were convinced that Beethoven was playing a joke and that it was not the quartet which had been promised.' The difficulty did not diminish with years, because in 1812 when a group in St Petersburg attempted the Allegro, 'Bernard Romberg trampled under-foot as a *contemptible mystification* the bass part which he was to play [and] the quartet was laid aside.'

Beethoven's string quartets are still among the most complex in the repertoire, and still pose many mystifications, an example being presented by the opening of this quartet. Despite being in F major, the listener is immediately thrown, because the cello begins on a C, the viola on an A, and the second violin on C! The tonic note is not heard until the end of the first bar, and there is not an unequivocal cadence in F major for several more bars. This tonal destabilisation, plus the increased complexity of all the parts, and the Allegro's tremendous length, emphasises again how far Beethoven had advanced since his Op. 18 Quartets.

Ambiguity is not prevalent in the opening of the second movement, but it soon becomes clear that its character is an eccentric one, as lyricism alternates with instances of the melodic fragmentation that became integral to Beethoven's later quartets. The third movement is imbued with intense pathos – a quality it shares with the slow movement of the 'Eroica' Symphony. In the sketches for the movement, Beethoven wrote (rather ambivalently) 'Eine Trauer-weide oder Akazien-Baum aufs Grab meines Bruder' ('A weeping willow or an acacia on the grave of my brother'), but it is not known which of his brothers he meant. The jaunty 'Russian' theme with which the cello opens the finale comes from a collection of Russian folk music, and Mussorgsky later used it in *Boris Godunov*. The finale – a monumental structure in itself – presents a complete change of mood from the deep melancholy of the *Adagio*, as Beethoven develops and transforms the ostensibly simple Russian melody into a magnificent conclusion to the first of his 'heroic' String Quartets.

**Heath Quartet: Oliver Heath (*violin*) Sara Wolstenholme (*violin*)
Gary Pomeroy (*viola*) Chris 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 the Wigmore Hall) is due for release in May 2017. Future highlights also include a return to the Berlin Konzerthaus, performances in Austria with Michael Collins, complete cycles of Jörg Widmann's string quartets at Kilkenny Festival, Berlin's Boulez Saal and Wigmore Hall, as well as numerous appearances at summer festivals in the United Kingdom and beyond.

Notable performances of the 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 United States the quartet also recently made their debut in New York at both Carnegie Hall and the Lincoln Centre, and continue their residence at Middlebury College, Vermont. In the UK they have also performed at the Barbican, Bridgewater Hall, Sage Gateshead, Perth Concert Hall and Queen's Hall Edinburgh. And in Europe they have appeared at the Kissingen Winterzauber and Schwetzingen Festivals as well as deSingel Arts Centre in Antwerp, Vara Konserthus in Sweden, Berlin Konzerthaus, Esterházy Palace, and the Musikverein and Konzerthaus in Vienna.

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.

Strong exponents of contemporary music, the Quartet have also worked with several leading composers including Hans Abrahamsen, Louis Andriessen, Brett Dean, Anthony Gilbert, Sofia Gubaidulina, Steve Mackey. They took part in the European première of Steve Mackey's 'Gaggle and Flock' for string octet, the world première of John Musto's 'Another Place' with Carolyn Sampson at the Wigmore Hall.

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

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