

ASSOCIATE ARTISTS CHIAROSCURO QUARTET

TUESDAY 3 MAY 2022

Chiaroscuro Quartet
Alina Ibragimova violin
Pablo Hernán Benedí violin
Emilie Hörnlund viola
Claire Thirion cello

String Quartet No 9 in G minor, D173 **Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

- 1 Allegro con brio
- 2 Andantino
- 3 Menuetto Allegro vivace - Trio
- 4 Allegro

It was Benjamin Britten who described Schubert's last creative phase as the 'richest and most productive eighteen months in music history'. Certainly, his last year included the magisterial Ninth Symphony, the Mass in E flat, the song collection *Schwanengesang*, his three final piano sonatas and the glorious Quintet in C. While these works are justifiably regarded as Schubert's crowning glories, his earlier output should not be overlooked, and of his journeyman years when he was still a reluctant school master, 1815 was miraculously prolific. It was a year that generated not just this Quartet in G minor, but also over 140 songs (including the remarkable *Erlkönig*), the completion of two symphonies (2 and 3), two masses and four one-act operas. In their optimism and spontaneity, these works would anticipate the expressive poignancy that Schubert would inhabit in his final years.

The Quartet in G minor dates from March 1815 and belongs to the first of two creative periods in quartet composition. From 1811 to 1816 Schubert completed eleven works in the medium and added four more between 1820 to 1826. Of course, his relationship with the genre developed from his own performing experience – more specifically from the family firm; he played the viola, his brothers Ignaz and Ferdinand the violin and his father the cello. It was for this domestic group that his earliest quartets were written, and they would have been played through, alongside quartets by Haydn and Mozart, when the family met on Sundays. The

music of his predecessors would have been thoroughly absorbed into his own works, none more so than Mozart whose String Quintet in G minor, K516 prompted Schubert to declare 'As from afar, the magic notes of Mozart's music still gently haunt me ... how many comforting glimpses of a brighter, better life have you brought into our souls'.

Schubert's G minor Quartet is not without ambition nor originality. Written in just a few days, it's a work of bold experimentation by a composer confident enough to bypass certain Classical conventions while also acknowledging them. The opening 'Allegro con brio' is built on two principal ideas: the first is a powerfully dramatic flourish immediately followed by a subdued response, while the second inhabits a more lyrical gesture which develops into imitative exchanges between the instruments and later dominates the central development section. All standard procedure so far, until Schubert launches the return of the opening theme's rising chords in B flat major, forsaking the more orthodox return to the home key.

There follows a gentle 'Andantino', its alternating moods emerging from what first appears to be a variation form structure. Plain to hear is the dialogue between upper and lower instruments and the tremolo effects within the inner parts. The influence of Mozart is most obvious in the outer passages of the 'Menuetto' which bears resemblance (in the harmony and wide intervals) to his G minor Symphony (K550). This may not have the rhythmic brio as Mozart's 'Menuetto', but the easy-going charm of the Trio is pure Schubert. If the lively finale displays further evidence of his structural irregularities (midway between rondo and sonata design), there is no doubt of Schubert's scintillating melodic invention.

String Quartet in G minor, Op 14 Emilie Mayer (1812-1883)

- 1 Allegro appassionato
- 2 Scherzo: Allegro assai
- 3 Adagio con molto espressione
- 4 Finale - Allegro molto

Born in the central German city of Friedland to a family of pharmacists and doctors, Emilie Mayer enjoyed considerable regard as a composer during her lifetime, and even in death she was honoured with a burial close to the graves of Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn. As a child she had been privately tutored and following the death of her father, a generous inheritance enabled her to study with Carl Loewe who became influential in promoting her mounting portfolio of works. Recognition for these was secured after her move to Berlin where, during the 1840s, she established herself and achieved critical acclaim for performances of her works. Whilst feted by Royals and respected by the city's major institutions, including an appointment as co-director of the Opera Academy, she left Berlin for Stettin (in nearby Poland) in the 1860s where she would devote herself entirely to composition and live as an independent woman.

Unlike the music of her near contemporaries Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, that of the Romantic German composer Emilie Mayer has remained largely undiscovered until recently. Recordings, BBC presentations and live performances have now removed some of the dust that had settled on her extensive catalogue of (mostly unpublished) works. These include no fewer than eight symphonies which led to her being known as the Female Beethoven. Chamber music also formed a large part of her oeuvre with piano trios, violin and cello sonatas, as well as piano pieces, songs and even an opera *Die Fischerin*. Her String Quartet in G minor, Op 14 - one of nine in the medium and the only one to be published in her lifetime - was premiered in Berlin in March 1858 some 18 years after the work had been written.

Cast in four movements, its procedures share those of her Classical predecessors. The first movement, a somewhat prolix 'Allegro appassionato', is built on two themes: an amiable first idea defined by a simple rhythmic pattern (heard in dialogue with the cello) and a jaunty theme (now in the relative major of B flat) carried by first violin and viola over a *pizzicato* bass. Occupying the central development is the initial rhythm of the opening idea, now thoroughly explored, and reminders later of the earlier secondary material. It is the cello that brings about the recapitulation, now modified by further flourishes from the first violin. A concise 'Allegro assai' follows, in which impish outer panels, with much witty imitation, embrace a gentle trio. An expressive slow movement inhabiting a Mozartian

elegance works towards a chorale melody given out by the second violin and later taken up by the first violin above a *pizzicato* cello. The closing Rondo finale occupies a profusion of ideas linked by an athletic scale figure to provide both formal cohesion and forward momentum.

Quartet No 9 in C, Op 59 No 3 Razumovsky Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- 1 Introduzione: Andante con moto – Allegro vivace
- 2 Andante con moto quasi allegretto
- 3 Menuetto: Grazioso
- 4 Allegro molto

When Beethoven moved to Vienna in 1792 he had neither a court appointment nor a position as an orchestral player. But amongst his newfound acquaintances and pupils were aristocratic patrons whose commissions were to provide some measure of financial security. Indeed, most of his seventeen string quartets were written to fulfil specific commissions, and many immortalised the names of his noble benefactors: Prince Lobkowitz was the dedicatee behind the Op 18 and Op 74 quartets, while the Russian cellist Prince Galitzin prompted three of the last five works in 1822. Some years earlier Count Rasumovsky - the Russian ambassador in Vienna and an amateur violinist of no mean ability - commissioned a set of three quartets in 1805. These were completed the following year and, at the Count's request, would incorporate a Russian folksong. In the event, Beethoven obliged only in the first two quartets although some have discerned a Russian flavour in the slow movement of the third.

By the time of their completion in November 1806, four years had elapsed since his six Op 18 quartets and during this time Beethoven had considerably lengthened his compositional stride. The intervening years had witnessed a marked expansion of his ambitions in works such as the *Eroica* symphony and the *Waldstein* piano sonata, both consciously pushing against the boundaries of the Classical tradition. While his Op 18 quartets were influenced by Haydn and Mozart, the Op 59 group belong to a different world – one not initially appreciated by the Viennese critic of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* who in February 1807 described the Op 59 group as 'very long and difficult' adding that they were 'composed with enormous skill, but not generally comprehensible'.

Perhaps the seeming inertia of the opening movement's slow introduction, where rhythm and melody are all but suspended, caused the reviewer some head scratching. Yet its intense remoteness is relatively short-lived, as tensions are swept away with the arrival of a sprightly idea launching the main 'Allegro vivace'. The sheer dynamism of the

ensuing movement, with each instrument assuming a concertante role, might also have perturbed a reviewer expecting something less radical and virtuosic. Most alarming might have been the obsessive rhythms, the wild leaps and the mini cadenza of the central development passage.

If the first movement is characterised by a bravura quality, the second is restless, generated partly by its repetitive quaver motion and *pizzicato* cello writing. Chromatic intervals within the opening melody might lead some to recognise a Slavic colouring. The succeeding 'Menuetto' is marked by a directness of expression, its symmetrical phrase patterns enclosing empathic rhythms in the central Trio. An unexpected shift to C minor provides both a coda and a bridge into the finale – a forceful movement based on a lively fugue announced by the viola. The movement's dizzying speed and ceaseless energy might have confounded those at the work's premiere anticipating something less feverish for a finale.

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CHIAROSCURO String Quartet

Formed in 2005, Chiaroscuro Quartet comprises violinists **Alina Ibragimova** (Russia) and **Pablo Hernán Benedí** (Spain), the Swedish violist **Emilie Hörnlund** and cellist **Claire Thirion** from France. Dubbed '*a trailblazer for the authentic performance of High Classical chamber music*' in **Gramophone**, this international ensemble performs music of the Classical and early Romantic periods on gut strings and with historical bows. The quartet's unique sound – described in **The Observer** as '*a shock to the ears of the best kind*' – is highly acclaimed by audiences and critics all over Europe.

Recent releases in their growing discography includes Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* and Haydn Opus 76 (1-3) and Beethoven Op 18 (1-3). Future planned recordings will complete these two pillars of the quartet repertoire in addition to Mozart 'Prussian' quartets.

Chiaroscuro Quartet was a prize-winner of the German Förderpreis Deutschlandfunk/Musikfest Bremen in 2013 and received Germany's most prestigious CD award, the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik in 2015 for their recording of Mozart's Quartet in D minor, K421 and Mendelssohn's Quartet No 2 in A minor, Op 13. Among the ensemble's chamber music partners are renowned artists such as Kristian Bezuidenhout, Trevor Pinnock, Jonathan Cohen, Nicolas Baldeyrou, Chen Halevi, Malcolm Bilson, Christian Poltera and Christophe Coin.

Recent engagements included their enthusiastically received debut concerts at Vienna Konzerthaus and Philharmonie Warsaw, their debut at Carnegie Hall as part of their first US tour and a return visit to Japan. Other highlights have taken the ensemble to the Edinburgh International Festival, London's Kings Place and Wigmore Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Auditorio Nacional de Música Madrid, Sage Gateshead, Auditorium du Louvre Paris, Théâtre du Jeu-de-Paume in Aix-en-Provence, Grand Théâtre de Dijon, Gulbenkian Foundation Lisbon, Boulez Saal and Beethoven Haus Bonn. They have been artists in residence in Port-Royal-des-Champs since 2009, with a concert series dedicated to the string quartets of Mozart.

In addition to taking up their residency at Turner Sims, the 21-22 season sees them appear at Philharmonie Luxembourg, return to Wigmore Hall, Boulez Saal, and Gstaad Festival, and undertake tours in Japan and Sweden. Chiaroscuro Quartet are grateful to Jumpstart Jr Foundation for the kind loan of the 1570 Andrea Amati violin.

Alina Ibragimova

Performing music from baroque to new commissions on both modern and period instruments, Alina Ibragimova has established a reputation as one of the most accomplished and intriguing violinists of her generation. As soloist, Alina appears with orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, London Symphony Orchestra, Swedish Radio Symphony, Boston Symphony, Montreal Symphony and Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony and has performed at chamber music at venues including the Wigmore Hall, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Mozarteum Salzburg, Musikverein Vienna, Carnegie Hall New York, Palais des Beaux Arts Brussels, and at festivals including Salzburg, Verbier and Aldeburgh. Born in Russia in 1985, Alina studied at the Yehudi Menuhin School and Royal College of Music with teachers including Natasha Boyarsky, Gordan Nikolic, Christian Tetzlaff and Adrian Butterfield. She was also a member of the Kronberg Academy Masters programme.

Pablo Hernán Benedí

Pablo Hernán Benedí was born in Madrid and began studying at the Padre Antonio Soler Conservatory of San Lorenzo de El Escorial with Polina Kotliarskaya. In 2009 he moved to London to continue his studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with David Takeno and Andrés Keller and was supported by scholarships from the Martin Musical Scholarship Fund, Juventudes Musicales and La Caixa. Since the age of 14, Pablo had regular contact with Gordan Nikolic who helped shape and nurture his development. Pablo is also a founding member of Trio Isimsiz. Current winners of the Borletti Buitoni Award Fellowship, the trio has

also won 1st prize and the audience prize at the Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition and 2nd prize at the Haydn Vienna Competition. As a soloist Pablo has performed with the Philharmonia, London Chamber Players and Concerto Budapest amongst others. He also works regularly as leader or section leader with Arcangelo, Concerto Budapest, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Swedish Radio Orchestra.

Emilie Hörnlund

Emilie was born in Gothenburg, Sweden. Formerly a member of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Emilie has held the position of Principal Viola at the Swedish Royal Opera since 2010. Emilie works with many other leading orchestras in the UK and Sweden, including BBC Philharmonic, London Chamber Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Kungliga Filharmonikerna Stockholm. In 2006 Emilie became the first viola player to reach the final of the Ljunggrenska Tavlingen (Swedish Soloist Competition) in Sweden. Emilie studied at the Falun Music Conservatory, Guildhall School of Music and the Royal College of Music with teachers

including Timothy Boulton, Jack Glickman, David Takeno and Andriy Viytovych. She also studied baroque viola with Annette Isserlis.

Claire Thirion

Born in France, Claire Thirion studied at the conservatoires (CNR) in Marseille and Boulogne- Billancourt, then at the Paris Conservatoire (CNSM), before entering the Royal College of Music in London to study with Jérôme Pernoo and Catherine Rimer (Baroque cello). In 2006 she was awarded the prestigious Tagore Gold Medal. Since completing her studies, Claire has been in great demand for the performance of both modern compositions and Baroque works. In 2008-2010 she held the position of principal continuo player with Emmanuelle Haïm's ensemble, Le Concert d'Astrée. As an active chamber musician, she is a member of the Ensemble Fragonard, which also performs on period instruments. Since 2006, she's part of a duo with Karine Selo, piano, and regularly performs in different Festivals in France and European countries. She is frequently invited as a guest leader for projects on period instruments with various ensembles.

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Schubert

Quartettsatz in C minor, D703

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