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# LEONKORO QUARTET

Thursday 3 November 2022, 7.30pm  
Djanogly Recital Hall, Lakeside Arts

## PROGRAMME

Divertimento in F, K138

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

String Quartet No.3 in F, Op.73

Dmitri Shostakovich

Interval

String Quartet in C minor, Op.51 No.1

Johannes Brahms

Divertimento in F, K138

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
(1756-91)



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*[Presto]*

Serenades and divertimenti – entertainment music for social occasions – absorbed much of Mozart's energies during his years in Salzburg. They range in scale from the eight-movement Serenade in D, K250, commissioned by the Haffner family for a wedding, and scored for a sizeable orchestra including two trumpets, to the three intimate Divertimenti, K136-8.

These were written early in 1772, and appear to have been conceived as a set, though there is nothing to indicate what prompted Mozart to write them. In Austria at the time 'Divertimento' generally indicated a work intended for solo players, but we are more likely today to hear them played by a string orchestra. So are they string quartets, symphonies without wind parts (they have sometimes, for no good reason, been known collectively as 'Salzburg symphonies'), or something else entirely? Stanley Sadie, in his book on Mozart's early career, argues that they relate, in style and form, to neither the symphony nor the string quartet of their day, and that they should simply be regarded as unique in Mozart's output, without reference to other genres.

Like the other two, K138 is in three formally and emotionally uncomplicated movements. Mozart gave no tempo indications for the first and last; these have been inferred from the music's character. The ebullient opening is followed by a gently moving andante and a sprightly rondo finale.

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## **String Quartet No.3 in F, Op.73 Shostakovich**

**Dmitri**

(1906-75)

*Allegretto*  
*Moderato con moto*  
*Allegro non troppo*  
*Adagio –*  
*Moderato*

Composed in 1946, Shostakovich's Third String Quartet is the first of six that he dedicated to the Beethoven Quartet, the ensemble with which he worked most frequently. They gave the premiere of his Piano Quintet with the composer in 1940, and the first performances of all his string quartets except the first and the last.

The five-movement structure of Quartet No 3 echoes that of the Piano Quintet and Symphonies Nos 8 and 9, all composed during the preceding six years. It also follows their example, and that of the Second Piano Trio, also from the same period, in the link between the fourth and fifth movements, the first time Shostakovich created a seamless join between two contrasting movements in a string quartet.

The first movement begins in an apparently carefree mood, with a deceptively playful theme for the first violin. But with the knotty fugal textures that characterise the central section, it soon becomes clear that things are not so straightforward. Soon after the start of this passage, the second violin introduces a falling phrase which is, in fact, the movement's opening theme in a highly compressed form, and this returns, on the first violin, to launch the quicker final section.

Dogged, almost fatalistic, arpeggios on the viola set the second movement in motion, supporting a widely-arching first violin theme. As this opening section comes to an end, all four instruments set up an eerie texture of quiet, clipped chords, from which emerge more flowing lines for the first violin, then the viola. The slow final bars die away, followed by the shock of the third movement, whose aggressively jabbing chords on the lower three instruments would re-surface in the violent scherzo of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony. The mixture of two-beat and three-beat bars adds a further unsettling element.

The Adagio is a passacaglia, a form in which the music unfolds over a continuously repeating phrase, though Shostakovich applies the technique less strictly here than in some of his other works. A sombrely powerful idea for the lower three instruments is answered by a fragile theme for the first violin, delicately

supported. The middle section is dominated by a repeated rhythmic figure for the lower instruments as the first violin takes over the opening theme. The brief middle section is more animated, before elements of the earlier material bring the movement to a profoundly introspective close.

This leads directly into the finale, and a long winding theme for the cello, with just isolated pizzicato gestures on the viola for company. The first violin takes it over, then introduces a new long-breathed theme, which it passes on to the viola, before a more animated, dance-like rhythm suggests an echo of the quartet's opening. From here the music builds to a strident climax, at the height of which the fourth movement's opening theme returns as a canon between the viola and cello. As this calms down, a persistent trill on the second violin forms a backdrop to the cello's new version of its opening theme. The dance-like theme reappears in its turn – all four instruments are now muted, to create a veiled effect – leading into the final slow section. Over sustained lower strings, the first violin tries to recall the cello's opening theme but eventually tails off, resigning itself to the three soft pizzicato chords that end the work.

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## String Quartet in C minor, Op.51 No.1

Johannes Brahms  
(1833–97)

*Allegro*

*Romanze. Poco adagio*

*Allegretto molto moderato e comodo*

*Allegro*

Early on Brahms had learnt his compositional craft in part through re-composing movements by Beethoven with his own themes, and he chose to publish as his Op.1 a piano sonata beginning with emblematic resonances of Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' and 'Waldstein' sonatas. His understanding of music and the concomitant evolution of his own creative voice were deeply conditioned by Beethoven's example, and, in the main, he found Beethovenian genres immediately well-suited to his expressive ideals. Yet in two genres to which his predecessor had made such notable contributions, the symphony and string quartet, he experienced perhaps a creative block, or, at the very least, a relatively protracted 'anxiety of influence'. His struggle with the symphony – during which he characterized Beethoven that 'giant marching along behind' – is well-known, less so, the struggle with the string quartet.

He had suppressed an early string quartet in B minor, which Schumann had encouraged him to publish, and worked on the C minor and A minor quartets Op.51 Nos.1 and 2 for some eight years, before composing them 'for the second time' in 1873; he also claimed by then to have destroyed some 20 previous quartets. Evidence for the formidable challenge posed by Beethoven's example in the genre is thus compelling: Brahms had to search out a way to be true to the tradition he loved, precisely by finding a renewal born of the fullest exercise of his own creativity.

In both symphony and quartet he decided to keep to the model of four separate movements, choosing to base the essence of his thinking therefore on early- and middle-period Beethoven. And in selecting C minor as key for his first published work in both these genres, he chose to confront the Beethoven of drama, energy and compression head-on. The breakthrough for the symphony was to come in the conception of the finale, with its 'speaking music' of horn-call, trombone chorale, and with its main theme, so reminiscent of Beethoven's 9th, yet treated so differently. The breakthrough for the string quartet surely lay in his retaining the Beethovenian dramatic momentum and intensity as essential, but enriching them with new harmonic resources on the one hand, and, on the other, seeking out the lyric hidden as latency within figure and gesture.

These aspects are announced in characteristic fashion in the opening bars of the C minor Quartet: the terse opening gesture is immediately fragmented, compressed, carried to a high climax on the first violin and brought to a stand. As the harmony sinks down, a new sustained motive is introduced, accompanied by residues of the opening, and elaborated with proto-lyrical decorations, before the music sinks yet lower to another stand, this time on the note F-sharp. Schoenberg used this modulation to B minor so near the beginning of the work as an example illustrating his view of 'Brahms the Progressive' in harmonic matters.

When the opening then returns, the thematic gesture is in viola and cello, with figurative revision of the accompaniment as the new first violin part. This carries the music into a bridge passage founded on syncopation and imitation in the context of another remote key, E-flat minor, in which the lyrical and the major tonality seek intermittently to break through. When the second subject does eventually appear, in the traditional key of E-flat major, it proves to be a melody of just five notes, which are treated to all manner of elaborations in the first violin and contrapuntal workings in the lower instruments.

Taking a lead perhaps particularly from Beethoven's 5th Symphony, Brahms lets each of his subsequent movements explore further aspects and implications of the figurative and gestural resources of his first movement. Thus the slow movement builds its opening paragraph from dotted rhythms and repeated-note figures; the third movement, a typically veiled Brahmsian take on the scherzo archetype, elaborates with sighing repeated notes and teasing chromatic harmony the sustained motive and its accompaniment from early on in the first movement; and the finale compresses dotted rhythm, repeated-note figures and that sustained motive into a single opening theme. When the finale's second subject appears, it is based, just as in the first movement, on a strictly limited number of notes, which are accorded immediate and far-reaching elaborations. There are particular thematic resonances from Beethoven's own compositions in this work, at their most potent in the echo of the middle of the Cavatina from Beethoven's String Quartet in B-flat Op.130 in the middle of Brahms's slow movement, and of the 'musette' trio of Beethoven's String Quartet in A minor Op.132 in the trio of Brahms's third movement. But such emblematic resonances, so typical of Brahms's artistic response to his heritage, do not get to the real heart of the renewal of the Quartet – that is surely deeply embedded in the drama, energy, gestural terseness and compression, in the finding out of emergent lyricism and new harmonic enrichments within the context of an inexorable figurative logic.

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## LEONKORO QUARTET

Jonathan Schwarz, violin  
Amelie Wallner, violin  
Mayu Konoe, viola  
Lukas Schwarz, cello

'The Leonkoro Quartet [...] has an enormous stage presence, glows for the music, takes full risks and amazes with its empathy for the respective sound of the pieces [...]

The string quartet, founded in Berlin in 2019, could hardly be described more aptly than in the review published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in January 2022. The ensemble is framed by brothers: Jonathan and Lukas Schwarz on first violin and cello, with Amelie Wallner on second violin and Mayu Konoe on viola providing the middle voices. Leonkoro - in Esperanto meaning 'Lionheart' - alludes to Astrid Lindgren's children's book *The Brothers Lionheart*.

The year 2022 has been a year of awards for the Leonkoro Quartet. In March 2022, the ensemble was honoured with the coveted and highly esteemed Jürgen Ponto Foundation Music Prize which is awarded every two years to an outstanding string quartet. In April 2022, the four musicians won 1st prize at the International String Quartet Competition at Wigmore Hall London and were also awarded 9 out of 12 special prizes. These included the prize for the best performance of a work from the 19th century, the Britten Pears Young Artists Programme Prize, the Leeds International Concert Series Prize and the Esterházy Foundation Prize.

In May 2022, the ensemble was awarded the 1st prize at Quatuor à Bordeaux Competition. They convinced not only the seasoned jury members, but also the audience who awarded them the Audience Prize and the Young Audience Prize. At the end of the month, they were appointed to the prestigious BBC Radio 3 New

Generation Artists' program for 2022 to 2024. This was followed by the MERITO String Quartet Award in November 2022. Unlike a classical competition, unbeknownst to the five selected ensembles the jury of renowned string quartet musicians – are evaluated at concerts over the course of a year. The MERITO String Instrument Trust will support the ensemble for four years including a composition commission.

The Leonkoro Quartet is mentored by members of the Artemis Quartet at the Berlin University of the Arts. The four musicians received further artistic support from Alfred Brendel, Reinhard Göbel, Rainer Schmidt (Hagen Quartet), Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartet) and Luc-Marie Aguera (Quatuor Ysaye). In addition to studying chamber music with Heime Müller at the Musikhochschule Lübeck, the quartet has been studying with Günter Pichler (Primarius Alban Berg Quartet) at the Chamber Music Institute of the Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofía Madrid since 2020 with the generous support of Santander Consumer Bank AG.

During the 2022/2023 season, the Leonkoro Quartet will perform at venues including the Konzerthaus Berlin, CAPE Ettelbruck, Alte Oper Frankfurt, the VIBRE Festival in Bordeaux, the String Quartet Festival in Heidelberg and the Dresden Music Festival. In addition, the ensemble will begin its three-year residency in Leeds and will play two concerts at Esterhazy Castle.