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DORIC STRING QUARTET

Thursday 6 October 2022, 7.30pm

Djanogly Recital Hall, Lakeside Arts

PROGRAMME

String Quartet in F minor Op.95 'Quartetto Serioso'

Ludwig van Beethoven

String Quartet in F, Op.50 No.5 'The Dream'

Franz Joseph Haydn

Interval

String Quartet in E minor, Op.83

Edward Elgar



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String Quartet in F minor Op.95 ‘Quartetto Serioso’ **Ludwig van Beethoven**
(1770-1827)

Allegro con brio
Allegretto ma non troppo
Allegro assai vivace ma serioso – più allegro
Larghetto espressivo – allegretto agitato – allegro

It wasn't a publisher or, still worse, a journalist who called it 'Quartetto serioso' but Beethoven himself. And he meant it. Once the intimidating main theme of the first movement takes hold it is difficult to escape its grip, which is retained in one way or another almost to the end of the work. A parallel lyrical impulse is evident from an early stage, even before the entry of the second subject on an expressive viola, but it is regularly suppressed by the angry group of semiquavers from the opening bar. The short development section is concerned with little else but the main theme, which is initially presented in fortissimo ferocity. In the recapitulation the lyrical material survives rather longer without interruption than in the exposition and the movement ends quietly. It does not, on the other hand, end peacefully.

The Allegretto ma non troppo in D major is not so much a slow movement as an expression of a vague unease set in motion by the downward steps of the cello at the beginning. While there is room for modest melodic expansion on first violin, it is in association with a restless quaver figuration in the inner parts and with some bizarre instrumental colouring. The second theme, introduced by viola, initiates a fugal episode, which is still more unsettling, particularly on the entry of the counter subject in staccato semiquavers.

The apprehension implied by the downwards steps of the cello at the beginning and at several other points of the Allegretto ma non troppo is proved to be well founded when, without a pause, the Allegro assai vivace forces an abrupt entry. So the F minor tonality of the first movement immediately regains its grip and, though it is relaxed in the two trio sections, it is actually intensified as the tempo accelerates towards the end. The Larghetto espressivo introduction to the last movement briefly laments the situation and the uncompromisingly bleak Allegro agitato seems to confirm it – until, that is, the magical change of key to F major and the brilliantly radiant coda.

What inspired this taut little drama, with its joyfully liberated ending, we do not know. But it might be worth recalling that the work completed just before it, in the spring of 1810, was the incidental music to Goethe's Egmont.

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String Quartet in F, Op.50 No.5 ‘The Dream’ **Franz Joseph Haydn**
(1732–1809)

Allegro moderato
Poco Adagio
Tempo di Menuet: Allegretto
Finale: Vivace

Haydn's Op.50 quartets, composed in 1787 and dedicated to the cello-playing King of Prussia, were the first set of six to be written since the famous Op.33 set was published in 1782 – it is possible he may have been thinking about them as early as in 1784, but the composition of the 'Paris' Symphonies (1785–6) and other substantial works intervened. Overall, the Op.50 pieces may be seen as tauter and more intellectual than those of Op.33: they can arguably be said to continue the line established by Op.20, in a perhaps more smoothly integrated stylistic mode. Subsequently, Op.50 would be fairly swiftly followed by a dozen equally inventive quartets, inspired by the artistry of the violinist Johann Tost: Opp.54, 55, and 64.

Where Op.33 was innovatory in its projection of lightness and comedy, and Op.20 reached out for a richness and a diversity of figure and idiom that were unprecedented in the string quartet up to that time, Op.50 set out to develop a new and more classicizing synthesis of elements, thereby expanding and intensifying the use of quartet resources – a synthesis that was also, to some extent, able to draw on the rather different approach to quartet texture represented by the groundbreaking quartet version of the

Seven Last Words (Op.51) which Haydn was also working on during 1787.

Whatever the force of these stylistic distinctions and differences of emphasis, the Op.50 quartets continue to exhibit Haydn's sharply etched phrasing and his supremely focused musical thought. He is at the same time both spare and concentrated in his writing – the economy (which is also a kind of extreme lucidity) is not a stripping back of musical content, but rather is itself full of meaning. These quartets also display, as perfectly as ever, his characteristic rhythmic energy and his airy buoyancy of texture – beyond matters of intellectual form and details of character and expression, this is what the quartets 'feel like' and 'sound like' as intrinsically musical experiences.

Haydn sold the Op.50 set to the Viennese firm of Artaria and also, simultaneously (and without Artaria's knowledge), to the English publisher, William Forster. Whether or not this was sharp practice in the late 18th century, might be debated. Haydn no doubt felt it was his right to make as much as he could out of his intellectual property, and he certainly wanted European-wide coverage for his new quartets (the chamber music world was no doubt waiting avidly for the new pieces). But in this case he does appear to have been, in effect, deceiving his publishers on both sides. Whether or not he saw this as somehow expedient, it shows us the slightly murkier side of musical dissemination and publication in the pre-international copyright era.

The opening Allegro moderato in 2/4 exudes an outgoing, classicizing spirit, cheerful and buoyant in character, with clearly phrased crotchet-quaver-semiquaver movement giving way to triplet semiquavers for all instruments, not just for the first violin – this fleet passagework comes in a great flourish towards the end of the exposition, episodically throughout the (compact) development and recapitulation, through to the close of the movement. It not only enlivens and dramatizes the musical discourse at moments of transition and change, in development or in modulation, but also gives it an exhilarating virtuosic edge. One would very much like to know who the original Eszterháza players of these pieces were.

The slow movement is a Poco Adagio (3/4, B flat major) with a broadly spun lyric melody for the first violin and smoothly phrased quavers in the accompaniment. This texture is striking for its hushed, poised, almost rapt quality, borne along as it is by the carefully sustained playing of the three lower instruments. One result of this legato, often parallel movement within the harmony is that the little changes of harmonic emphasis and direction emerge with a telling intensity – such a fundamentally simple, yet evocative, approach manages to suggest intensive twists and turns within an otherwise calm unfolding of the melody that must have been what first gave rise to the concept of the dream ('Der Traum') as the emblematic title of this movement.

The Minuet (Allegretto, 3/4) has no conventionally contrasting Trio. Rather, the space usually occupied by the Trio is taken up by a 'developmental' variant of the Minuet itself, in F minor and A flat major, as a counterpart to the main tonic, F major. Haydn's play with the boundaries of the

form brings, almost by sleight of hand, a sense of breadth, and colour, and dramatic shadows to a basically straightforward, sectional movement type.

The Finale is (again) a taut and energetic movement, a 6/8 Vivace with characteristic witty slides *sull' una corda* for the first violin (surely a folk-effect here, as also in the finale of the 'Frog' Quartet Op.20/6). Overall, the finale is light and propulsive in character, but it holds striking contrasts in reserve – the unfolding and development of the material being whimsical, exhilarating and serious by turns, through its varying episodes. Again, the course of the movement is enlivened with forceful semiquaver passagework which drive the process forward, sometimes in exciting counterpoint. As ever, the discipline of Haydn's invention and intellectuality is worn – and displayed, – very lightly and easily, with the deftest of touches. A brilliant and satisfying conclusion to a quartet rich in ideas.

String Quartet in E minor, Op.83

Edward Elgar
(1857–1934)

Allegro moderato
Piacevole (poco andante)
Allegro molto

Elgar published only one quartet and quintet, at the age of 61. Around 1905, admiration for the Brodsky Quartet, then prominent in Manchester, stimulated plans for a quartet which were cast aside by the First Symphony, but this explains why Op.83 is dedicated to the Brodskys.

There is a great contrast between the pre-First-World-War Elgar – the composer of the symphonies, choral works and grand ceremonial music – and the end-of-war Elgar, the composer of the autumnal Cello Concerto and of the three late chamber works (Violin Sonata, String Quartet and Piano Quintet) – which were the composer's only notable excursions into chamber media. The confident exuberance of his pre-war music had been replaced by a more reflective mood. With this music, autumn had followed high summer in Elgar's career: the colours were browner, the days shorter and the composer found himself in a different world from the one he had known before the war. These four works were all written in 1918–19; after these years he wrote no important music, although he made sketches for a Third Symphony and a Piano Concerto.

In the first movement, no sooner is the loping 12/8 motion established than it is checked by a series of fanfare-ish chords whose hollow irresolute harmonies are at odds with their formal square-cut gestures – and the impetus is dissipated. The same thing happens at the climax of the development; the once serene and flowing second subject is achieved without emphasis or drama. It is possible to hear in this movement a failure of invention, or war-weariness, particularly if it is lightly compared with something as young and fresh as the Serenade for Strings. But it is equally possible, listening differently, to hear a quiet but very controlled voice; experienced, undogmatic and private.

The second movement, often considered the gem of the three, is more conventional. The easy-going relationship between metric and harmonic values make it a perfect complement to the first movement and, though poignant, it is undemanding. The artless, winsome melody is heard at the start without the first violin, and indeed much of the movement's charm lies in its colouring, particularly in the long spells of drowsy repetitions against pedal points. The finale has more of the dash and flow of the pre-war orchestral works, and neatly combines the characters of a scherzo and a last movement.

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DORIC STRING QUARTET

Alex Redington violin

Eva Aronia violin

Hélène Clément viola

John Myerscough cello

Firmly established as one of the leading quartets of its generation, the Doric String Quartet receives enthusiastic responses from audiences and critics across the globe. With repertoire ranging from Haydn through to Bartók, Adès and Brett Dean, the Quartet's schedule takes them to the leading concert halls around the world including Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Vienna Konzerthaus, Berlin Konzerthaus, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Stockholm Concert Hall, Louvre, Carnegie Hall and Kioi Hall Tokyo as well as regular performances at Wigmore Hall.

With a curiosity for repertoire and setting, the Doric Quartet was delighted to be invited to give the Austrian premiere of John Adams' "Absolute Jest" for String Quartet and Orchestra at the Vienna Konzerthaus with John Adams conducting. The Doric also gave the Dutch premiere with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic at the Concertgebouw under Markus Stenz and performed the piece with the BBC Scottish Symphony and BBC Symphony Orchestras. Their recording of the piece with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Peter Oundjian, released on Chandos in 2018, was named Recording of the Month in BBC Music Magazine and praised for the "sumptuous sweetness and laser-like clarity" of its performance. Other recent projects have included cycles of the complete Britten and Bartók String Quartets, with performances at Wigmore Hall, Aldeburgh Festival and the West Cork Chamber Music Festival.

Alongside main season concerts the Quartet has a busy festival schedule and has performed at the Schwarzenberg Schubertiade, Grafenegg, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schwetzingen, Edinburgh, Aldeburgh, West Cork, Cheltenham, Delft, and Risør Festivals. The Quartet also enjoys collaborations with several contemporary composers and a recent commissioning highlight has been Brett Dean's String Quartet No 3. Given its world premiere in June 2019, "Hidden Agendas" was co-commissioned for the Doric by the Berlin Konzerthaus, Carnegie Hall, Amsterdam String Quartet Biennale, Edinburgh International Festival, Musica Viva Australia and the West Cork Chamber Music Festival.

Highlights of the 2022/23 season see the Dorics performing at European venues including Hamburg Laeiszhalle, De Singel, De Bijloke and Tivoli Vrendenburg as well as making three visits to Wigmore Hall. Collaborations include performances in Belgium and the Netherlands with Cuarteto Quiroga, as well as revisiting their partnership with Pieter Wispelwey. The Quartet undertakes its annual North American tour, which this year features performances in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco with Benjamin Grosvenor. The Quartet returns to Japan for a tour including concerts in Osaka, Nagoya, Yokohama and Tokyo.

Since 2010 the Doric Quartet has recorded exclusively for Chandos Records. The Quartet's most recent release of the second instalment of their Mendelssohn String Quartet cycle was awarded Editor's Choice in Gramophone and Chamber Choice in BBC Music Magazine. 2019 saw the release of the Doric's benchmark recording of the complete Britten String Quartets. The Quartet's ongoing commitment to Haydn has so far seen them record the complete Opus 20, Opus 76, Opus 64 and Opus 33 Quartets with the recordings attracting acclaim including Editor's Choice in Gramophone, Choc du Mois in Classica Magazine and a shortlisting for a Gramophone Award. Future recording plans including the complete Beethoven String Quartet cycle as well as works by Berg and Webern.

Formed in 1998 the Doric String Quartet won first prize at the 2008 Osaka International Chamber Music Competition and 2nd prize at the Premio Paolo Borciani International String Quartet Competition. In 2015 the Quartet was appointed as Teaching Quartet in Association at the Royal Academy of Music in London and from 2018 the Quartet took over the Artistic Directorship of the Mendelssohn on Mull Festival, a position which sees them play a key role in implementing the Festival's core mission of providing young chamber music professionals with a week of intensive mentoring, coaching and development.

The Quartet's violist Hélène Clément plays a viola by Guissani from 1843, generously on loan from Britten-Pears Arts and previously owned by Frank Bridge and Benjamin Britten.