

Henschel Quartet

'The Henschel Quartet's concert was a highlight of my concert-going year. I have rarely heard Debussy's Quartet in G. minor portrayed with such passionate commitment, insight and artistry. The slow third movement ached with intensity, and there was an audible sigh from an enraptured audience at its close. The Henschel's Beethoven op.59 no.3 in C major was delivered with a brio and confidence that senior quartets rarely muster, it was as close to perfection as to be beyond reproach. Magical'.

Paul Cutts, *The Strad* (Review of Wigmore Hall Concert December 2001)

In 1994 the Henschel siblings had the great fortune to find the ideal cello partner in Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj. In their intensive years of study with the Amadeus Quartet and Prof. F. Beyer and later with members of the Alban Berg, La Salle and Melos Quartets the young artists were confronted with the highest international standards. In 1995 the Henschel Quartet were prize-winners of no less than five prizes at International String Quartet competitions in Evian, Banff and Salzburg for the best interpretation of works ranging from Mozart up to contemporary composers. In 1996 they won the first prize and gold medal at the coveted Osaka International String Competition. Highly acclaimed debut concerts in many of Europe's prestigious concert halls helped to firmly establish the Henschel Quartet as one of today's leading string quartets. Constant critical acclaim has led to an impressive international career.

The quartet receives numerous re-invitations to perform at major international festivals and prestigious chamber music cycles worldwide including performances at the Tanglewood Festival (USA), Kuhmo Festival (Finland), the Schubertiade Feldkirch, the BBC Proms concerts in London, the Aldeburgh Festival, Festival de Wallonie (Belgium) Rheingau Festival, Schwetzingen Festival and the Kissinger Summer Festival (Germany).

This season's engagements include concerts in the Herkulessaal Munich the Portrait Gallery - Dresden, the Redoute in Bonn, the Tivoli - Copenhagen, the Grand Theatre Toulouse, The Royal Scottish Academy in Glasgow for the BBC, The European Music Summer in Passau, the Festival Summer Nizza. In April 2003 the Henschel Quartet will embark on its ninth concert tour of Japan

In addition to numerous concert performances as a quartet, they also appear regularly with other musicians. Amongst those who have performed with the Henschel Quartet are members of the Amadeus Quartet, the Cherubini Quartet, Radovan Vladkowitz, Eduard Brunner, Sharon Kam, Alfredo Perl and Christian Elsner.

The Henschel Quartet has, inter alia broadcast for BBC London, Radio France, RTBF Belgium, DRS Switzerland, Danish Radio, Radio Polskie, CBC Canada, YTV Japan, WDR, BR and NDR in Germany.

The Henschel Quartet has made 5 recordings and these have been awarded a number of prizes including the "Deutsche Schallplattenkritik" prize. The Quartet's discography includes quartets by Haydn, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Mozart and most recently Ginastera that was released to great critical acclaim by *Gramophone*.

STOUR VALLEY ARTS & MUSIC

52nd Season: 2002-2003

Henschel Quartet

Christoph Henschel *violin* - Markus Henschel *violin*
Monika Henschel-Schwind *viola* - Matthias Beyer-Karlshøj *cello*

Friday 8 November 2002 8pm

St. Mary's Church East Bergholt

PROGRAMME

String Quartet in D major, Op. 18 No.3 Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770 -1827)

Allegro ; Andante con moto ; Allegro ; Presto

String Quartet No 2, Op.56 Karol Szymanowski
(1882 -1937)

Moderato, dolce e tranquillo ; Vivace, scherzando ; Lento

INTERVAL

String Quartet in A minor, D804 Franz Schubert
(‘Rosamunde’) (1797 – 1828)

*Allegro ma non troppo ; Andante ;
Menuetto and Trio (Allegretto) ; Allegro moderato*



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PROGRAMME NOTES

Beethoven's first quartet was written during a time of considerable personal distress. At thirty years of age, his well-established performance career was under threat from progressive loss of hearing, and he was turning for solace to composition. In 1801 he wrote to his friend Wegeler: "for two years I have avoided almost all social gatherings because it is impossible for me to say to people: 'I am deaf'...in another profession it would be easier, but in my profession it is an awful state...I beg of you to say nothing of my condition to anybody...I live only in my notes..." He had already created a considerable amount of music, and some piano pieces of the period exhibit striking originality and passion. In other genres it is fair to say that his style had not yet developed its full individuality. He was striving to come to terms with the mature works of his illustrious forbears - a few years earlier, he had copied out all six quartets of Haydn's Opus 20, as well as Mozart's K.387 and 464. Surviving sketchbooks show that his own first quartets were composed between 1798 and 1800. When they were published in 1801 as Opus 18, the first in order of composition - the D major - appeared as No. 3. Its thoughtful beauty gives little indication of its composer's inner turmoil - a warning against looking too hard for connections between an artist's personal life and his art. The first movement has a number of features - the quietly understated opening, the sharing of melodic material so that all parts have equal importance, the gradual build-up to more energetic music, the unexpected key in which the second subject is introduced and its striking reappearance near the very end of the movement - which show that Beethoven had thoroughly absorbed the lessons from his study of Haydn. The second movement is a rondo, based on a very simple theme which might have become pedestrian in the hands of a lesser composer. But Beethoven's texture is mostly very rich, and the harmony often more chromatic than that of Haydn or Mozart: the rhythmic detail of each individual part shows exquisite judgement. The finale shows that Beethoven was familiar with examples such as that of Haydn's *Military Symphony*. Haydn contrasts the springing energy with passages of almost uncanny stillness: Beethoven cannot yet match these, though one or two passages hint at them. The ending achieves a notable touch of humour in its descent from the preceding climax.

Szymanowski's compositional career falls into three phases. The first reflects his study of the classical masters, his compatriot Chopin, and high Romantics such as Wagner and Strauss. The second emerged from his interest in the impressionism of Debussy and Ravel. The third has its roots in the creative re-working of folk melodies found in pieces such as Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, which he heard during a visit to Paris in 1921, and which stimulated him to devise a Polish equivalent. For his raw material he turned to the exotic songs and dances of the south, where the Tatra mountains form a natural barrier between Poland and Slovakia. The resort town of Zakopane had long been popular with Polish writers, artists and musicians, and it was here at the Villa Atma that Szymanowski spent much of his time from 1922 onwards. The String Quartet No. 2 (1927) exhibits strong Tatra folk-music elements, although its first

movement to some extent harks back to the harmonic world of the composer's impressionist phase. The second, with its ostinato accompaniment patterns and strong rhythmic energy, shows an acquaintance with the music of Bartok. The slow final movement has a folk-melody as the main theme of its fugal texture. It also incorporates other Tatra melodies (used also in the one-act ballet *Harnasie* which was being written during the same period).

1824 was a year of mixed fortunes for **Schubert**. Operatic ventures had ended in disappointment, some of his friends had moved away, and he had begun undergoing treatment for syphilis - a hit-and-miss affair at that time. Its progress is observed in letters between his friends Schwind and Schober, for example: [February] "Schubert has given up his wig and shows a charming cygnet's down..." [March] "He says that after a few days of the treatment he felt how his complaint broke up and everything was different...He drinks tea lavishly, goes bathing on certain days, and at the same time is superhumanly industrious..." [April] "Schubert is not very well. He has pains in his left arm and cannot play the piano at all". During the same period there were some encouraging events, such as the publication of *Die schöne Müllerin* and its enthusiastic reception (not by the public, but by his own circle), and the first performance of the *Octet* at the house of Count Troyer, followed a little later by that of the A minor Quartet. The players were led by Schuppanzigh, and probably included at least two other members of the famous Razumovsky quartet. Although Schubert had been writing quartets since he was thirteen, and had within his family a ready-made laboratory within which to experiment, it took him ten years to achieve the maturity of idiom of which this work is the first complete example. We are gripped from the very first notes - a mysteriously pulsating bass; the second violin tracing a bleak accompaniment figure; a violin melody conveying in its many falling patterns a rich pathos. As always with Schubert, the argument unfolds in broad melodic spans rather than the concise motivic working usually found in Beethoven. The second movement delivers the serene tune borrowed from the incidental music to *Rosamunde*, though many phrases are tinged with wistfulness. The haunting motto which begins the third movement establishes in three notes a complete emotional world. The main melody draws on an earlier setting of words by Schiller: "Lovely world, where art thou? Return once more, thou fair and flowered age of Nature!" The central section moves into the major key to give a suggestion of the innocent happiness which has been lost, before returning to the resignation of the main section. After three movements containing so many shadows, can a work end on a joyous or triumphant note in the fourth? Alfred Einstein thinks not, suggesting that though the finale has a major key, it is "in the same Hungarian disguise which Schubert was to use again in *Die Winterreise* in an exactly similar sense: outwardly exuberant and cavalier, but - as a number of mysterious phrases suggest - without any real consolation".

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