

## Henschel Quartet

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). In the 2003/04 season the Henschel Quartet will perform amongst, others at the Wigmore Hall- London, Concertgebouw- Amsterdam, Tivoli Copenhagen and the Liederhalle in Stuttgart.

In March 2003 the Goethe Institute in Melbourne invited the Henschel Quartet to Australia for a three -week tour. As a result of this tour the Henschel Quartet has been re-invited to tour Australia in May 2004. A further highlight of the 2003 season was the Henschel Quartet's cycle of six concerts of Beethoven Quartet at the Tivoli Copenhagen leading to a re-invitation for July 2004.

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 numerous 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 Ginastera that were released to great critical acclaim by *Gramophone*. In 2004 their latest CDs will be released Vol 2 and Vol 3 of the complete Mendelssohn string quartets (Arte Nova) as well as Respighi's "Il Tramonto" and selected pieces by Schulhoff with mezzo soprano, Magdalena Kozena on the Deutsche Grammophon label.

The splendid instruments of the Henschel Quartet, two violins by Stradivari, a viola by da Salo and a cello by Grancino, contribute to the ensemble's acclaimed richness of sound and inexhaustible wealth of colour.

### Mainardi Piano Trio

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## Henschel Quartet

Christoph Henschel violin  
Markus Henschel violin  
Monica Henschel-Schwind viola  
Matthias D Beyer-Karlshøj cello

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770 -1827)  
String Quartet in B flat major, Op 18 No 6

*Allegro con brio*  
*Adagio ma non troppo*  
*Scherzo*  
*Adagio – Allegretto quasi allegro*

**Felix Mendelssohn** (1809-1847)  
String Quartet Op 44 No 2

*Allegro assai appassionato*  
*Scherzo: Allegro di molto*  
*Andante*  
*Presto agitato*

INTERVAL

**Benjamin Britten** (1913 - 1976)  
String Quartet No 3

*I Duets: With Moderate Movement*  
*II Ostinato: Very Fast*  
*III Solo: Very Calm*  
*IV Burlesque: Fast – con fuoco*  
*V Recitative and Passacaglia*  
(La Serenissima)



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## Programme Notes

To familiarise himself with string quartet texture, **Beethoven** had copied out Mozart's K.387 and 464 and all six quartets of Haydn's Opus 20. These works exemplify the architectural assumptions of high classicism: a first movement whose sonata form carries the main intellectual weight of the work, a slow movement displaying the composer's lyrical gifts, a dance movement, and a light-hearted or high-spirited finale. During the course of his career, Beethoven totally transformed this scheme by shifting the centre of gravity from the first movement to the last. Philosophical and political developments - the aspirations, if not the actual events, of the French revolution - and changing ideas about the status of the individual, in particular the artist, in relation to society all played a part in shaping his approach. Imbued with the aspirations of the Enlightenment, he came to see large-scale works as a progression from 'darkness' to 'light'. He wanted the nature and tone of the finale to define the whole work as a symbolic process of growth or striving towards a higher ideal: obvious amongst many examples would be the *Fifth* or the *Choral* symphonies. In Op.18 N° 6, we find one of his early experiments with the idea that the finale might be the place for a work's most serious musical ideas. He gives it a slow introduction with the slightly puzzling title *La Malinconia* (melancholy) and the instruction "This piece is to be played with the greatest delicacy." The forty-four bars which follow contain the most serious music in the whole of the six Op.18 quartets, with dramatic dynamic contrasts, some very mysterious harmonies, and a short passage of *fugato*. When the main body of the finale begins, its three-in-a-bar suggests not 18<sup>th</sup> century light-heartedness, but rather a sense of purpose. The slow introduction returns to interrupt before the movement reaches its brief final *prestissimo*.

After travels in Britain, Italy and Switzerland, the 1830s were years of increasing fame and public responsibilities for **Mendelssohn**. A life of enviable social and creative freedom gradually gave way to an incessant round of performing, conducting, administering cultural and educational schemes, and writing to order for festivals, with all the travelling between major centres – Berlin, Paris, Leipzig, Düsseldorf, London – these activities entailed. He was probably the first composer to experience pressures of the kind so familiar to leading musicians nowadays. One observable result was a decline in the spontaneity of some compositions, though happily this does not apply to the Op 44 quartets, which emerged during a particularly happy period following the composer's marriage. No 2 was first performed by David's quartet at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in November 1837. The E minor Violin Concerto, written a year later, is foreshadowed in the soaring melody of the first violin at the beginning of the quartet. The rising arpeggio that opens the movement gives rise to a quicker version of itself, which becomes an important integrating factor. Another thematic element is the flight of very soft, rapid notes which appears first in unisons and octaves, and soon shows itself to be a source of contrapuntal figuration throughout the movement. The G major melody serving as second subject is a derivative of the principal E minor theme - the two ideas might be regarded as the masculine and feminine aspects of the same motive.

In the scherzo, despite the triple time, no vestige of minuet style remains. Homophonic passages are intermingled with linear treatment, with the motive of four repeated semiquavers acting as a unifying common factor. An unexpected detail is the appearance, of a new and graceful tune on the viola which strays in and retreats almost at once, as if half apologetically. No other instrument is allowed to touch this theme, but the viola has it again, in more confidently extended form and in the major, near the end of the movement. The *andante* is a song without words, protected against sentimentality by the direction that it must on no account be dragged. The violin melody draws attention to the arpeggio link with the main theme of the first movement: on its return, this melody is reassigned to the cello. The final movement, like each of the others, derives its structure from a variety of sonata form: it maintains the high level of invention and vivacity which characterises the whole work.

The Third Quartet was **Britten's** last major work, completed in 1975, a year before his death. He composed the bipartite last movement during his final visit to Venice, basing the theme of the concluding passacaglia on the sounds of the bells of two city churches. Commentators have seen various details of the work as premonitions of death, and whilst such things can be overstated, it is true that in 1975 Britten was very ill. Owing to a problem with his shoulder, he had to use special manuscript paper with only two staves to a page - what a difference modern music-writing technology might have made! From the start of the opening 'Duets' (the first of them between second violin and viola), we launch into a mysterious sound world, trills and pizzicatos floating against a backdrop of drawn-out sighs and dissonance. The opening chords of the Ostinato movement bring us back to earth with a Bartókian vigour, although there is just possibly an intimation of mortality in the pizzicatos, with their suggestion of the ticking of a clock. The following Solo movement counterpoints the first violin against the other instruments in turn. This movement achieves a tonal resolution on C major which the composer seems to identify with himself: though the end, when it arrives, not only comes 'with a question', as he himself put it, but draws attention to the arbitrary nature of closure in art as in life. The Burlesque, with its raucous self-parody and *danse macabre* atmosphere, is a species we have met before. Does it suggest Britten pushing against the surface of his own mortality, like Michelangelo's "Captive" striving to escape the marble? The Recitative and Passacaglia can be thought of as a funeral march with its restful, unequivocally tonal end. Ashenbach's 'I love you' motif from the opera *Death in Venice* is woven repeatedly into this final slow movement, sometimes distorted, and sometimes barbed with regret. It may be intended to suggest the redemption or transfiguration of Ashenbach, with whom Britten clearly identified, and towards whose E major tonality both first and last movements reach out. Commentators seem agreed that this quartet is as profound a work as anything Britten composed: Hans Keller, to whom it is dedicated, wrote that here the composer had taken 'that decisive step beyond – into the Mozartian realm of the instrumental purification of opera'.