



Lammermuir Festival

Autumn Special

Online from 10 September 2020, 1:00pm | Holy Trinity Church, Haddington

Navarra String Quartet

Magnus Johnston violin I • Marije Johnston violin II
Clare Finnimore viola • Brian O’Kane cello

with

Philip Higham cello

Franz Schubert String Quintet in C Major, D. 956

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Franz Schubert String Quintet in C Major, D. 956

1. Allegro ma non troppo
2. Adagio
3. Scherzo: Presto – Trio: Andante sostenuto
4. Allegretto

Franz Schubert was unique in being the only canonic Viennese composer to have actually been born in Vienna. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Vienna was a rapidly growing cosmopolitan city, as migrants poured in from across the Austro-Hungarian empire. As part of this economic boom, the city became home to a growing bourgeoisie, who helped support its musical culture — and particularly the market for chamber music. Schubert was born the son of a music-loving teacher and, although he is often regarded primarily as a song composer, his first musical experiences were as a string player. He began violin lessons with his father at the age of six, quickly progressing to playing as part of a family quartet, and composed his earliest chamber works at thirteen. Although from around 1814 onward he became preoccupied with song, in the later years of his short life, he returned his attention to writing chamber music, producing some of the most daring and original works in the repertory.

Despite his prodigious talents, Schubert lived a precarious life. Writing to the Leipzig publisher Heinrich Probst on 2 October 1828, Schubert told him, 'I have composed three piano sonatas, which I would like to dedicate to Hummel; several poems by Heine of Hamburg, which were received very well here, and, finally, a quintet for 2 violins, 1 viola and 2 violoncellos. I have performed the sonatas to great applause, but the quintet will only be performed for the first time in the coming days. If any of these compositions might be suitable for you, let me know.' Probst did not take Schubert up on his offer: A month and a half later, at the age of just thirty-one, Schubert was dead.

The quintet is probably Schubert's finest chamber work — and certainly the most ambitious in terms of its scale. Unlike Mozart's quintets, which doubled the viola, Schubert opted to add a second cello. The additional tenor voice brings real depth to the texture, affording Schubert the possibility of exploiting different groupings of the five instruments in imaginative ways to produce sonorities that, in places, sound almost orchestral.

The opening movement is based on an expansive formal plan, coming in at almost 20 minutes. Indicated *Allegro non troppo* ('Not too fast'), the opening subject plays a clever trick on listeners, giving the impression it opens with a slow introduction — only to

segue straight into the second subject. While the standard late-eighteenth-century opening movement was typically based on a clear two-subject exposition, Schubert extends his second subject and seems to tag on a third subject, using the two cellos together in an elegant duet accompanied by the upper strings. Despite the considerable length of this opening movement, it never outstays its welcome and always commands the listener's attention with the tension it generates between remote tonal areas and the way Schubert constantly plays with different instrumental textures, frequently calling on the players to play *pizzicato* (i.e. pluck their strings).

After the drama of the opening, the *Adagio* that follows offers immediate repose, with the first introducing a touchingly simple melody that has an uncanny vocal quality. Schubert plays with different means of accompanying this, sharply juxtaposing major and minor harmonies to create a wide range of colours. While he includes a stormy central section in F minor, the overriding mood is one of serenity, with all sense of time seemingly disappearing. The German writer Thomas Mann stated that he would like to hear this movement on his deathbed (although it does not seem this wish was ever granted).

Following on from this, the Scherzo presents a rude awakening. Exploiting the enhanced resonance of open strings, Schubert employs the entire quintet to sound out a series of ever more insistent horn calls, moving through a series of increasingly audacious tonal areas. The trio is indicated to be performed at a slower tempo — *Andante sostenuto* ('Slow and sustained'). This comes as a real surprise: such a relationship between the scherzo and trio was quite unusual, even in the late 1820s — Beethoven very occasionally introduced a slower trio, but never one that was quite so different in character from the preceding music, as Schubert does here.

The final movement opens in the tonic minor, though this introduction quickly gives way to the home key of C major. The structure of this movement is rather difficult to describe succinctly, as Schubert seems to consciously play with the expected norms. It resembles a sort of rondo, with a distinctly rustic theme that repeatedly comes around. However, Schubert was seemingly unable to help himself, consistently varying this with a sense of real humour — its light-heartedness giving no indication whatsoever that Schubert had any idea the end of his life lay just around the corner.

Since its formation in 2002, the **Navarra Quartet** has built an international reputation as one of the most dynamic and poetic string quartets of today. Selected for representation by the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) from 2006 to 2010, they have been awarded the MIDEM Classique Young Artist Award, a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, a Musica Viva tour, and prizes at the Banff, Melbourne and Florence International String Quartet Competitions. The Navarra Quartet has appeared at major venues throughout the world including the Wigmore Hall, Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, the Sage Gateshead, Kings Place, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Esterházy Palace, Luxembourg Philharmonie, Berlin Konzerthaus, the Laeiszhalle in Hamburg and international festivals such as Bath, Aldeburgh, Lammermuir, Presteigne, Bergen, Grachten, Sandviken, Schwetzingen, Rheingau, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Aix-en-Provence, Bellerive, Harrogate Chamber Music and the BBC Proms.

Further afield they have given concerts in Russia, the USA, China, Korea, Australia and the Middle East, and have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, RAI 3 (Italy), Radio 4 (Holland), SWR (Germany), Radio Luxembourg and ABC Classic FM (Australia). The Quartet collaborates with artists such as Li-Wwei, Guy Johnston, Mark Padmore, Allan Clayton, Francesco Piemontesi, John O'Connor, Simone Young and the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

Highly-acclaimed recordings include Haydn's *Seven Last Words* for Altara Records and a disc of Peteris Vasks' first three String Quartets for Challenge Records, which they recorded whilst working closely with the composer himself. The recording was described by critics as 'stunning', 'sensational' and 'compelling', and was nominated for the prestigious German Schallplattenkritik Award. More recently, the Navarra Quartet recorded a disc for NMC Records featuring the music of Joseph Phibbs, and future recording plans include Schubert's late quartets.

Formed at the Royal Northern College of Music, they commenced their studies under the guidance of the late Dr Christopher Rowland. Their development continued with studies in Cologne with the Alban Berg Quartet, Pro-Quartet in Paris, the International Musicians Seminar at Prussia Cove and from residencies at the Britten-Pears School in Aldeburgh and at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. A constant desire to evolve sees the Quartet play regularly to revered musicians such as Eberhard Feltz, Ferenc Rados and Gabor Takacs Nagy. The Navarra Quartet are dedicated to teaching the next generation of musicians in masterclasses and summer courses, and they recently completed a three-year residency as the Associated Ensemble at the Birmingham Conservatoire.

The Quartet plays on a Hieronymus II Amati violin, a Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume violin (kindly loaned to Marije by a generous sponsor through the Beares International Violin Society), and a Grancino cello made in Milan in 1698, generously on loan from the Cruft - Grancino Trust, administered by the Royal Society of Musicians.

Recent highlights include their US debut at New York's Lincoln Center, performances at the Southbank Centre's International Chamber Music and Leeds International Chamber Music Series, as well as tours of Ireland, the Netherlands and Scotland. The Navarra Quartet received the prestigious Dutch Kersjes prize in December 2017 in the Royal Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. Highlights in 2019/20 include a tour of Ireland, returns to Champs Hill and Wigmore Hall and their debut at the Heidelberg String Quartet Festival. They also play chamber music in Cuenca, Eastbourne, Evosges and Alfriston, and proudly direct the seventh edition of their Weesp Chamber Music Festival.

Philip Higham enjoys a richly varied musical life: a passionate chamber musician, equally at home in concerto, duo and unaccompanied repertoire, he especially relishes Classical and German Romantic music, in which he is frequently and happily immersed as principal cellist of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He has appeared frequently in recital at Wigmore Hall — including a notable performance of the six Bach suites there in 2017 — and at other prominent venues and festivals both at home and abroad, and is regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3. His two solo recordings for Delphian Records, of the Britten and Bach solo Suites, have received considerable praise, the Britten chosen as 'Instrumental disc of the month' in *Gramophone* magazine during 2013. He enjoys collaborations with pianists Alasdair Beatson and Susan Tomes, violinists Erich Höbarth and Alexander Janiczek, the Navarra and Benyounes string quartets, Hebrides Ensemble, and, as concerto soloist, with Royal Northern Sinfonia, the Philharmonia, the Hallé and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. He also draws considerably on his musical experiences with conductors Emmanuel Krivine and Robin Ticciati.

Born in Edinburgh, Philip studied at St Mary's Music School with Ruth Beauchamp and subsequently at the RNCM with Emma Ferrand and Ralph Kirshbaum. He also enjoyed mentoring from Steven Isserlis, and was represented by YCAT between 2009 and 2014. In 2008 he became the first UK cellist to win 1st prize at the International Bach Competition in Leipzig, and followed it with major prizes in the 2009 Lutoslawski Competition and the Grand Prix Emmanuel Feuermann 2010.

Philip plays a cello by Carlo Giuseppe Testore, made in 1697. He is grateful for continued support from Harriet's Trust.



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