



kings place

Sunday 23 November

London Chamber Music Series

Wihan Quartet

Presented in partnership with
The London Chamber Music Society

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Since 1999 the London Chamber Music Society has managed the celebrated concert series which can trace its origins to the Sunday concerts at South Place from the 1880s and then Conway Hall from 1929. Their legacy is extraordinary, the concerts having been associated with many important premieres and numerous famous performers over the years, including Henry Wood, Frank Bridhe, Albert Sammons, Eugène Ysaÿe and Percy Grainger.

Wihan Quartet
Hall One, 6.30pm

Leoš Cepicky *violin*
Jan Schulmeister *violin*
Jiri Žigmund *viola*
Aleš Kasprik *cello*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
String Quartet in G major K387

Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959)
String Quartet No 2

INTERVAL (20 minutes)

Antonin Dvorák (1841-1904)
String Quartet in A flat major Op 105

The Wihan Quartet

With its unique and spellbinding sound the Wihan Quartet has made an impact in concert venues around the world. Heirs of the great school of Czech playing, the Quartet takes its name from Hanus Wihan, the founder and cellist of the Bohemian Quartet and close friend of Antonin Dvorak. The Quartet was formed in 1985 and is still made up of the original four members. The Quartet has an outstanding reputation for the interpretation of its native repertoire as well as for the many classical, romantic and modern masterpieces of the string quartet repertoire. Since winning the London International String Quartet Competition in 1991, and a number of other major chamber music competitions, the Wihan Quartet has developed an impressive international career with regular visits to the US and Japan, major festivals and concert halls throughout Europe. As well as sharing their skills with students throughout the UK, the Quartet is Visiting Quartet in Residence at Trinity College of Music, London and also works regularly for the Cavatina Chamber Music Trust and Pro Corda and the National School for Chamber Music. The Wihan Quartet is regularly heard on BBC Radio 3 as well as radio and television in the Czech Republic and has made Europe-wide broadcasts on several occasions.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – String Quartet in G Major, K. 387

- I. Allegro vivace assai
- II. Menuetto: Allegro (Allegretto)
- III. Andante cantabile
- IV. Molto allegro

Of Mozart's six quartets dedicated to Haydn and published in late 1785, half were not entirely new. Two of the most famous ('Hunt', K. 458 and the 'Dissonance' quartet, K. 465) derive from the second half of the set. The significance of the quartet heard this evening, completed in Vienna in 1782, is that it opened the set: its stylistic refinement and memorable melodic writing was a benchmark for those that followed. Collectively, the works became known as the "Haydn" quartets. The nickname is appropriate, since they came after a period in Mozart's life in which he studied the elder composer's music extensively. Haydn, in turn, glowingly praised the set, famously remarking to Mozart's father Leopold, "Before God, and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste, and... the most profound knowledge of composition." From the composer credited with transforming the string quartet medium into an identifiably consistent genre, Haydn's eulogy is significant enough. The reciprocal influence Mozart's set had on Haydn's own later quartets would make this mutual admiration arguably the most celebrated in music history.

The technical complexity of Mozart's style is not always apparent to his listeners. The mixture of styles on the "surface" of his music, for example, is apparent in this quartet's opening 'Allegro vivace assai' movement, with its industrious interplay between instruments and much extended central development section. The Minuet, similarly, is more chromatic than might be expected, and with its closely imitative texture, the material often treads a thin line between decoration and disorientation; the G-minor trio which it frames is, typically, more secure. The slow movement introduces Mozart's beautiful touch of melodic embellishment to the quartet; the appearance of a triplet accompaniment figure, introduced by the cello, signals a more rhapsodic texture, which the soloistic first violin especially takes up. The finale starts with a subject imitated contrapuntally by the other instruments. This element of counterpoint, as much a structural as textural device for Mozart, is a continuing feature of this progressive movement.

Bohuslav Martinu – String Quartet No. 2

- I. Moderato (Andante) - Allegro vivace
- II. Andante - Moderato
- III. Allegro - Scherzando

Martinu's myriad influences and prolific composition make it difficult to define his musical personality in simple terms. His studies with Roussel in Paris exposed the young Czech composer to the music of "Les Six" and jazz. Among his compatriots, he admired Dvorák, and Janáček exerted his own influence. But for a composer who spent most of his creative life away from his native Czechoslovakia, it is not surprising that Debussy and Stravinsky were the most decisive influences upon Martinu's formative style. Written in Paris, the important Second String Quartet (1925) pre-dates the emergence of many of Martinu's modernist tendencies, although he became increasingly prolific towards the end of the decade, completing his first opera, *Voják a tanečnice* (The Soldier and the Dancer), much more chamber music, and a number of jazz-inspired works.

Whereas Martinu's First String Quartet has been described (and dismissed) by some as undiluted Debussy, the Second is a much grander and more eclectic work. French influence nonetheless lingers in its slow opening, before the tempo quickly picks up and states the theme in seemingly fragmentary form. With its array of articulation across the ensemble, the movement bombards the listener at first – the ensuing contrapuntal development lends a certain amount of cohesion, and although the recapitulation is abridged, the virtuosic, accelerated coda is a clever conclusion. Stylistically, the disjointed feel between and within movements is typical of Martinu, and so it is in the more overtly Modernist slow movement. This is especially apparent when the parallels between instruments grow louder and more dissonant; the more serene, mysterious opening eventually returns to frame the movement. The finale is introduced by a wonderfully forceful, decelerating flourish that gives way to the type of lighter music that characterises this hyperactive movement. Martinu's articulative bag of tricks once again evidences his mastery of the quartet, and his motivic (rather than melodic) writing does much to obscure the rondo form in which the movement is ostensibly cast. Likewise, the movement ends, not a little incongruously, firmly in G major.

Antonín Dvorák – String Quartet No. 14 in A flat Major, Op. 105

- I. Adagio, ma non troppo - Allegro appassionato
- II. Molto vivace
- III. Lento e molto cantabile
- IV. Allegro, non tanto

This work, the last of Dvorák's fourteen quartets, was begun in New York early in 1895 and received its Vienna premiere a year later. The quartet is actually the penultimate in the published order, preceded by the 'American' quartet and followed by the Quartet in G Major, Op. 106, which was begun earlier but finished later. Dvorák returned from the United States during the same year and resumed work on Op. 105 as he taught at the Prague Conservatory. Little wonder, then, that to some the quartet resembles an enhanced retrospective of his previous chamber music, while to others it marks a personal expression of thanksgiving on returning home.

The intense, slow introduction to the first movement, for example, soon evolves into a pleasant theme followed by further melodic material of typically Czech rhythmic and melodic character. The "hunting-call" second subject is brief and busy contrapuntal work develops its material in a far more abstract manner. Curiously, the recapitulation virtually airbrushes the first subject from sight as the second subject segues into memories of the 'Adagio' introduction – such was Dvorák's care for cohesion across the quartet. The second movement, the most distinctly Bohemian in texture and rhythm especially, is cast as a Czech *furiant*. In a further nod to the concept of musical unity, the trio section derives its opening figure from part of the opening theme. The slow movement wears its late Romantic heart on its sleeve, with beautiful key-surfing harmonies and an abiding, extended melody that weaves its way throughout. The Schubertian touches midway through the movement add a dose of chromaticism to the music, but this quickly relents in the charming developing variation that ensues. The inventive final movement features more soloistic writing and greater interplay than had been heard hitherto. An extra second subject in the key of G flat can also be heard in the movement, although in the manner of the 'Allegro appassionato', the subject is absent in the recapitulation.