

**London Chamber Music Society presents
The Henschel Quartet and members of Finchley Children's Music Group
Sunday 20 November, 6.30pm**

Johann Sebastian Bach – Orgeltriosonate No. 2 in C minor, BWV 526 (c. 1727)

- I. Vivace
- II. Largo
- II. Allegro

Bach first made his name as an organist in Arnstadt, having been trained by another organist, his brother Johann Christoph. Later, Bach's career took him to Köthen (1717–23), where his engagement at the Pietist court of Prince Leopold freed him to concentrate on instrumental music (there being no call for his ornate church music). From there relocated to Leipzig, where he remained until death in 1750. As Kantor at the Choir School of St Thomas, Bach was responsible for teaching the choristers and providing music for various churches in the city. His six trio sonatas for organ belong to this period—Bach is thought to have written the works for his son, Wilhelm Friedrich—though their precise dating is speculative. As their titles imply, the texture of the sonatas usually comprises three distinct voices: two melodic lines and a bass part for pedals. Yet the relationship between parts in the innovative BWV 526 sonata is slightly different. Its opening movement, marked *Vivace*, sees the upper parts paired in thirds, while the E-flat *Largo* pits two accompanying lower parts against the melody (and, later, vice versa). Characterised by its opening interval of a fourth, the final movement is more conventional.

Three Carols with The Finchley Children's Music Group

Gustav Holst – Lullay my Liking, Op. 34, No. 2

Grace Rossiter (arr.) – The Angel Gabriel

Derek Smith – *Carolingia* (UK premiere)

Holst's 'Lullay my Liking' is a musical setting of the anonymous text of the fifteenth-century English folk carol. The composer's interest in English folksong and word-setting led him to follow in the footsteps of his compatriots, most notably Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams. 'Lullay my Liking' dates from 1916, by which time Holst had already completed the *Four Old English Carols* (1907) and his setting of Christina Rossetti's 1872 Christmas poem 'In the Bleak Widwinter' (1906)—not to be confused with Harold Darke's equally famous later version. The trilogy of carols continues with Grace Rossiter's moving arrangement of the Old Basque carol 'The angel Gabriel' and concludes with Derek Smith's *Carolingia*, the winning work of the BBC Music Magazine/Henschel Quartet composing competition of which the composer writes:

“‘Carolingia’ is a made-up word intended to combine thoughts both of Christmas music and tongues. It also invokes Carolingian, the dynasty founded by Charlemagne crowned Roman Emperor in 800AD, which did so much to unify European culture, language and belief. The form of my piece was specified by the Henschel competition: Christmassy, about twelve minutes in length, for four boy's voices and string quartet. Despite the encroachment of political correctness, I still think of Christmas as a Christian festival of thanksgiving for Christ's birth. This led me to join together four carols using both celebratory and reflective quartet writing in a traditional quasi-sonata form with groups of motifs and contrasting episodes. Since language has its own music, I chose carols in different languages which I feel best epitomise their sentiments. The carols are interlinked by the quartet using three main ideas: a torrent of fifths redolent of ancient times (church bells, plainsong); a

jolly tune modulated by a flattened turn which recurs elsewhere and ends the piece; and a reflective passage in descending broken thirds over syncopated whole-tone harmony which assists transition between moods. These ideas frame more introspective sections, one based on a carol set by Bach (whose music I quote), the other the 'Coventry Carol'; in their different ways, each invokes the stillness and beauty of a star-lit winter night. Throughout I make much use of harmonic false relations with hints of modality invoked by the carols. Or did I perhaps choose the carols because of these implications? I am not an academic musician or an amateur psychologist and apologise to anyone whose enjoyment of *Carolingia* is marred by these crude attempts at self-analysis!"

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – String Quartet No. 18 in A major, K. 464, 'The Drum' (1785)

- I. Allegro
- II. Menuetto
- III. Andante
- IV. Allegro

K. 464 is the fifth of Mozart's so-called 'Haydn' quartets. Together, their stylistic refinement and memorable melodic writing set new benchmarks for quartets that followed, and their moniker is apt: Haydn joined Mozart to perform them soon after they had been written and their composition also 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. The reciprocal influence of Mozart upon Haydn's later quartets made this mutual admiration arguably the most celebrated in music history. The sublime simplicity and technical complexity of Mozart's style is its greatest paradox, though this is not always apparent to listeners of his music. The mixture of styles on the 'surface' of his music, for example, is apparent in this quartet's opening *Allegro*, whose melody begins innocently enough but is soon echoed in counterpoint, followed by a quizzing second theme. The second-movement minuet begins in octaves and is duly developed until a contrasting E-major trio is heard. The quartet takes its now-obscure nickname from the *Andante*: the cello's repeated *staccato* figure in the movement's sixth variation is the 'drum'. (The subtitle is better known on the continent than in Britain.) These variations follow a principal theme from the first violin, marked *sotto voce* (literally, 'under voice'). Pithy rhythmic figures also blossom in the finale, although, like this quartet's famous 'Dissonance' cousin—K. 465, another 'Haydn' quartet—its initial harmonies are more ambiguous.

Felix Mendelssohn – String Quartet No. 6 in F minor, Op. 80 (1847)

- I. Allegro assai – Presto
- II. Allegro assai
- III. Adagio
- IV. Finale: Allegro molto

Mendelssohn's autobiographical Sixth String Quartet was his last major work. It was written as a lament in memory of his sister, Fanny, whose death in May 1847 overwhelmed him. (His own premature death followed just six months later.) With his brother Paul, Mendelssohn retreated during the summer to Switzerland, where he completed the *Three Motets*, Op. 69 and drafted this often discordant Op. 80 quartet. He already had five string quartets to his name: the first two (Opp. 13 and 12, written in that order) descend from the late quartets of Beethoven; the three Op. 44 quartets, written during the happy period of his honeymoon and first year of marriage, exhibit a more Classical tendency. Mendelssohn's grief makes Op. 80 his least typical quartet and his method of 'unifying' works through recurring musical references makes its ferocity all the clearer. The first movement is introduced by a distinctive texture brimful with rapid, repetitive semiquavers, its angst-ridden theme interrupted only by the yearning voice of the first violin. The second *Allegro assai* appears more playful at first but its urgency is revived through the instruments coming together as one—'unison' writing—and a potent, cross-rhythmic theme that prevails (a disturbed relative of the famous E-minor Violin Concerto, perhaps). The lower strings briefly take over at the movement's midpoint with a more contemplative episode, but the call-and-response phrasing resumes with further syncopations and chromatic harmony. The *Adagio* harks back to the first movement with its interplay between the

wailing violin and cello and this reappears to clarify the structure. The *Finale* recalls the same movement but develops in an opposite direction to the elegiac feeling of the third movement; Mendelssohn's rage is now unrestrained, as his harmonies and turbulent exchanges of trill-like motifs across the quartet attest.

Notes: Christopher Dromey