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73rd season

2019-20

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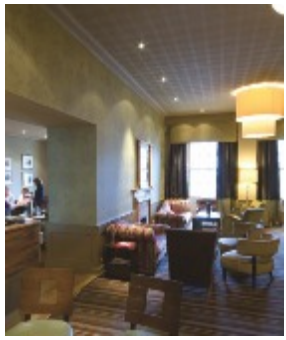

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FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET

50th Anniversary Season

Lucy Russell & Marcus Barcham Stevens (violins)
Alan George (viola), Sally Pendlebury (cello)

2019/20 SEASON

OPENING CONCERT

Burgh Hall, High Street, Peebles
Sunday 8 September 2019 at 7.30 pm

PROGRAMME

Approx. duration (minutes)

Thomas Alexander Erskine, 6th Earl of Kellie (1732-1781)

Quartet in C minor (Kilravock No.8) (c.1770) *15*

i. Allegro
ii. Andante
iii. Allegro

Franz Peter Schubert (1797-1828)

String Quartet No.12 in C minor, D.703 (1820) *16*

i. Allegro assai ('Quartettsatz')
ii. Andante (realized and completed 1994/2012 by **Brian Newbould**)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No.11 in F minor, Op.122 (1966) *17*

i. Introduction: *Andantino*
ii. Scherzo: *Allegretto*
iii. Recitative: *Adagio*
iv. Etude: *Allegro*
v. Humoresque: *Allegro*
vi. Elegy: *Adagio*
vii. Finale: *Moderato*

INTERVAL (20 minutes)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

String Quartet No.2 in F major, Op.22 (1873/4) *35*

i. Adagio - Moderato assai
ii. Scherzo: Allegro giusto
iii. Andante ma non tanto
iv. Finale: Allegro con moto

PROGRAMME NOTES

(kindly supplied by Alan George)

Thomas Alexander Erskine, 6th Earl of Kellie (1732-1781)

Quartet in C minor (Kilravock No.8) (c.1770)

Thomas Erskine (popularly known as "Fiddler Tam") was born in Kellie Castle, Fife, in the same year as Haydn, but pre-deceased the young Mozart by ten years, a body ravaged by excess of all kinds finally giving up on him during a trip to Brussels. In contrast to his notorious high living was his unique standing as Grand Master of both English and Scottish Masonic Lodges - a fellow mason (and former schoolmate) was the architect Robert Mylne, who built St Cecilia's Hall in Edinburgh. So it is a pleasing thought that Kellie himself may have had a hand in its unusual design and superb acoustic….

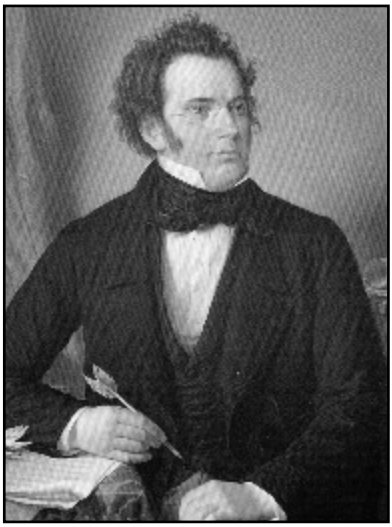
The eminent music historian Dr. Charles Burney wrote of him as follows:

> "The late Earl of Kellie, who was possessed of more musical science than any dilettanti with whom I was ever acquainted…..shut himself up at Mannheim….studied composition [with Johann Stamitz], and practised the violin with such serious application that, at his return….there was no part of theoretical or practical music, in which he was not equally versed with the greatest professors of his time. Indeed, he had a strength of hand on the violin, and a genius for composition, with which few professors are gifted."

Our current knowledge of Kellie and his work is almost exclusively due to the efforts of fellow Scottish musician David McGuinness, director of Concerto Caledonia - to whose pioneering recording of this and other vocal and orchestral works (led by the FSQ's own Scot, Lucy Russell) listeners are enthusiastically directed. Much of his music has been lost, but some of his chamber music survived in Kilravock Castle - where, Dr. McGuinness tells us, "Bonnie Prince Charlie played chamber music the night before the disastrous Battle of Culloden". The present edition was prepared by David McGuiness himself from the Kilravock set of parts (now safely preserved in the National Library of Scotland), and is brought to life once more this evening with grateful acknowledgment.

Franz Peter Schubert (1797-1828)

String Quartet No.12 in C minor, D.703 (1820)



Despite the quality of many of this work's predecessors it has to be accepted that Schubert is more generally represented in string quartet programmes these days by the four great products of his maturity, notably the A minor, *Death and the Maiden*, and the G major (even if a few more enterprising groups do show an awareness that most of the earlier quartets are also well worth performing, and contain material as characteristic as anything he ever wrote). This C minor quartet (the first of the final four) belongs to a frustratingly large catalogue of incomplete works: a good half of his piano sonatas remain in such a state; and of the thirteen symphonies he is known to have begun, only seven have reached us fully intact. Likewise the list of quartets does not escape unscathed: here the C minor occupies a position of comparable importance to the more famous Symphony No.8 (also, of course "unfinished"): it is with these works that Schubert, respectively the supreme symphonist and quartet writer, truly reveals himself for the first time.

The depth of expression and formal accomplishment demonstrated in these works surpasses any of his previous essays in those forms: for example, the first movement of the B flat quartet (D.112) is crammed full with the most exquisite ideas - almost too full, since at that stage the composer had not quite acquired the experience and wisdom to mould them into a totally cohesive unit. His next quartet (the G minor, D.173) proved to be much tighter, but it is this C minor Allegro movement - composed five highly prolific years later - which is little short of a structural miracle: it is a sonata design of perfect yet highly original symmetry, with hardly a bar which does not contain something derived somehow or other from the opening whispered motif. Yet it all appears so effortless that, absorbed in the breathtaking drama and lyricism of the music, one is almost unaware of the sheer ingenuity behind it.

The piece has somehow come to be known universally as *Quartettsatz*, though there is no real justification for this outside the German speaking countries.

However, Schubert did actually begin an Andante in A flat - as he also did a scherzo for the "Unfinished" symphony, in both cases amounting to several pages of score. Some years ago a degree of excitement was provoked by an extraordinary lady who claimed to be a mouthpiece through which the spirits of dead composers - notably Liszt - could dictate new pieces. How priceless she might have been had she been able to persuade her "visitors" to complete some of their unfinished compositions through her! Since that time, the present composer has indeed found his own Rosemary Brown: our leading Schubert scholar, Prof. Brian Newbould, has long ago put all Schubertians in his debt by affording us a glimpse of how the composer himself might have finished a substantial number of his incomplete torsos: although the most valuable will surely prove to be his extraordinary realisation of the visionary Tenth Symphony (on which Schubert was working almost right up to his death), his speculative completion of the second movement of this C minor quartet would seem to be of no little interest or value. Indeed, it is as remarkably Schubertian as one might expect from a musician so totally steeped in this highly personal language as to breathe it as naturally as the air round him: there is the heartrending lyricism, the daring and imaginative modulations, the heartstopping *pianissimi*, such that the listener is seriously challenged as to exactly what is Schubert and what is Newbould……..

Prof. Newbould writes (modestly) of his intervention:

> "The *Quartettsatz* is a work of such quality that it has always been a matter of deep regret that there is not sufficient of the slow movement to enable it to be finished with any conviction by another hand. That it was unfinishable was my conviction as much any anyone else's: but, more than ten years after I completed several symphonies by Schubert, and close upon the heels of a fresh and detailed study of the composer's instrumental œuvre, I re-examined this tantalising fragment and felt compelled to attempt its completion. It had become clear that a further theme should and could be extrapolated from the first theme to complete the exposition.
>
> "Like orchestras, string quartet ensembles tend not to play fragments, and in any case audiences tend to be frustrated by premature endings. A completion offers at least the merit of obviating the unreality of an interrupted experience. Moreover, whatever one's degree of acceptance of it as a credible or congruous continuation, it suggests wherein the potential of the composer's material may lie and stimulates the listener's own creative/critical understanding of the composer's artefact."

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

String Quartet No.11 in F minor, Op.122 (1966)

The eleventh quartet was dedicated to the memory of Vassily Petrovich Shirinsky, who had died the previous summer and who, as second violinist of the Moscow Beethoven Quartet, had taken part in premières (Leningrad and/or Moscow) of all its predecessors. Following a re-appraisal of the composer's middle period quartet style in Nos. 9 and 10, it returns to the more introspective mood of the two 1960 quartets (7 and 8). There is an impression of great spareness, even when the full ensemble is used, which can be attributed in the main to the almost complete absence of any real polyphony: the texture is generally no more than straightforward melody-with-accompaniment. In fact, much of the musical argument in this work is carried by one player at a time, with the other three in simple homophonic support. Plentiful use of parallel part-writing, either in octaves, fifths, or triads, lends further lean-ness to the distinctive sound of the eleventh quartet, inhabiting as it does a strangely withdrawn region which in the end is deeply touching. In this way it strongly resembles the seventh, which arose out of similar circumstances (the death of his first wife) and for which the composer had a special affection. Those who know Shostakovich only through his large scale symphonies will find here an aspect of his musical personality which might mildly surprise them.

The casting of the quartet into seven highly contrasted movements, rather like a suite of character pieces, might seem to have run an inherent risk of diffuseness; but at this stage in his career Shostakovich was firmly committed to musical continuity and cogency. Not only does he dispense with movement breaks once again, but he also achieves a disarmingly simple unity through stringent economy of means: there are no more than two principal motifs on which the entire work is constructed; and these are subjected to a kind of Lisztian thematic metamorphosis, together with Shostakovich's own highly developed technique for exploiting the latent possibilities of a given set of melodic intervals. So all the characters are in reality the same one: the same clown with different faces, be it tender, whimsical, severe, mercurial, droll, elegiac, or the simple yurodivy (the traditional Russian "Holy Fool").

Up to the end of the fourth movement all the violin solos in this piece, from expressive *cantilena* to dazzling pyrotechnics, have been taken (naturally enough) by the first violin - a great irony, of course, given the quartet's dedicatee…. At last - immediately in the wake of the leader's virtuosic *Etude*! - his No.2 moves upstage, completely on his own. But he can only play two notes, and he manages to keep them up throughout the entire *Humoresque* - which doesn't even get its own tempo, there being no change of pulse from the preceding movement. All this clearly represents a wry comment on the traditional rôle of the second violin (not that Shostakovich normally perpetrated such a tradition in his quartets!); it would also appear to reflect Vassily Shirinsky's droll sense of humour, as described to the writer by Maxim Dmitrievich Shostakovich. Eventually we come to the real purpose of this piece: an *Elegy* which begins with great seriousness and intensity; its dominant rhythm, perhaps recalling the *Eroica* for the Beethoven Quartet, is grimly prophetic of the *Funeral March* in No.15 - this composed eight years later, following the death of Shirinsky's brother (the cellist in the group).

Soon after completing this quartet, on the night of May 28/9 1966 - indeed, immediately following the occasion of the Leningrad première itself - Shostakovich suffered a major heart attack. He had had to face ill health on and off for most of his life, often spending weeks at a time in hospital. But now a lurking fear was turning into a reality: human mortality - *his own* mortality - was staring him in the face, and it inevitably coloured the remainder of his life and work. The last four quartets stand apart from the rest for a number of reasons, but that fateful night might well have represented a dividing line over which he could never return; one cannot help sensing a premonition of this in the music of the eleventh quartet.

INTERVAL (20 minutes)

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Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

String Quartet No.2 in F major, Op.22 (1873/4)

19th century Russia generally lacked a strong quartet tradition: her finest examples were undoubtedly by Tchaikovsky and Borodin - a grand total of five and a quarter! - but those of the latter were disapproved of by his Nationalist colleagues in "The Five", while Pyotr Ilyich listed chamber compositions with strings among his most hated instrumental combinations! An amateur enthusiasm proliferated, typified by the Friday quartet meetings at the home of Belaiev and his subsequent publication of various short pieces in two volumes, appropriately entitled *Les Vendredis*. However, it has to be said that the leading Russian composers were temperamentally more suited to the scale and dramatic scope of opera and symphony. Nevertheless, the example set by those two masters was soon taken up by such successors as Glazunov and Taneyev, both of whom produced substantial bodies of quartets; the mantle eventually passed to Dmitri Shostakovich, who single handedly changed one particular course of Russian musical history, in that scores of Soviet composers have since turned out scores of quartets, the majority clearly demonstrating their debt and influence.

Of all the greatest composers Tchaikovsky must be one of the least *comprehensively* known and understood: from his enormous output one could list about fifteen works - virtually all of them orchestral - which have since achieved a popularity which this tragically self-doubting man could only dream about. Thereafter comes an inexplicable gulf dividing fame from obscurity. Amongst all this relatively unknown music are the five full scale chamber works; only five, it is true, which suggests that Tchaikovsky felt far less at home in such constrained surroundings. He himself admitted as much, but in this sense he is no different from the majority of later nineteenth century composers. Indeed, his friend Laroche writes of Tchaikovsky's musical likes and dislikes - not only with regard to composers past and present but also to instrumental combinations: it would appear that he sported a particular contempt for solo piano with orchestra, and for chamber works with strings! And even though the piano trio must be regarded as one of his finest and most deeply personal creations, yet he himself declared on more than one occasion that he found

this particular combination of instruments "torture to listen to"! However, the established string quartet repertoire is a particularly exclusive company, and the quartets of Tchaikovsky - as with so many of his contemporaries - are only reluctantly admitted. But unlike most of those contemporaries Tchaikovsky is usually prepared to accept the strictures imposed by the medium, and does not normally strive for orchestral sonorities. Inevitably one can detect the occasional passage, particularly in this F major quartet, where his exuberance led him to overstep the boundaries of idiomatic quartet writing; yet at the same time the first movement displays a lightness and elegance of touch which at times recalls the assurance and effortless skill of Mozart or Mendelssohn.

In the summer of 1873 Tchaikovsky spent his holidays in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France. But he was restless the whole time and on his return to Russia spent a couple of weeks at Oussovo, in the steppes, where, in his solitude, he at last felt able to relax. He arrived home in excellent spirits and immediately set to work on this, his second string quartet. The piece has provoked wildly varying opinions: the composer's healthy frame of mind notwithstanding, Edwin Evans curiously observes that "not a ray of sunshine is allowed to show itself through the entire first movement"; and in his otherwise excellent book on the composer Michel Hoffman judges it to be inferior to the other quartets, lacking real spontaneity of feeling. Even our leading British Tchaikovsky scholar, Prof. David Brown, considers that "for all its impeccable skill and fertile detail, the [first] movement is too bland"! Yet Tchaikovsky himself wrote, "I have always looked upon it as one of my finest scores. None was composed more easily and spontaneously. I wrote the quartet in one breath, as it were".

The present performers prefer to accept Tchaikovsky's own valuation here! Nevertheless, it must be said that, for this most communicative of composers, Op.22 can seem strangely inaccessible: it requires truly concentrated listening for its great beauties to make their fullest impact. Parts of the first movement do indeed wear a subdued tone which, together with its unusually bold harmonic language and its lack of the expected "big tune", make it difficult to grasp. For example, the very opening could almost have been imagined by Schönberg, beginning as it does with a dissonant cluster of three whole tones, which only slowly spread into a recognisable cadence. Indeed, there is no key signature for the whole of the introduction, and the absence of tangible tonality is not really resolved until the first movement proper is under way - and even then the tonal centre is ambiguous, suggesting G minor before eventually arriving in the long strived-for home key of F major. After such intense searching, the second subject wears a thoroughly out-of-doors air, so essentially Russian with its fragment of earthy tune repeated to characteristic changing

backgrounds. Indeed, the 1870s saw Tchaikovsky at his most nationalistic - as much so as Borodin, Mussorgsky, or any of *The Five* - deeply influenced by the leader of the group, Balakirev. Such works as the *Little Russian* symphony (No.2), music for *The Snow Maiden*, the folk opera *Vakula the Smith* (later re-written as *Cherevichki*) all came out of these years, reaching a climax with what Stravinsky later described as the most Russian of all operas, *Eugene Onegin*. Much of Quartet No.2 inhabits this world, and is all the more precious for the joy and passion it communicates.

The next movement proves to be a clever combination of scherzo superimposed onto an oblique waltz, achieved through its puzzling seven-beat lilt - maybe a model for the five-beat waltz in the sixth symphony. No less characteristic is the highly poignant *Andante* which follows - a more extended and eloquent version of the type of piece epitomised by the famous *Andante Cantabile* from his previous quartet. The opening gesture of this wonderful movement seems to foreshadow the corresponding moment at the beginning of the finale in the aforementioned sixth symphony; and indeed this otherwise sunny, exuberant, and energetic work does occasionally reveal unexpected portends of what was recently described by a leading scholar as "one of *the* great symphonies". As in some other works of this period (for example, the third symphony) Tchaikovsky approaches the climax of his finale (likewise in *polacca* style) by way of a fully worked out fugue, bristling with quirky fun; after which a coda of hair raising difficulty (and dissonance) rounds off a typically large scale composition with a barely contained recklessness.

notes © AG 2018

Fitzwilliam String Quartet

The original members of the FSQ first sat down together at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, in October 1968 - as undergraduates during their inaugural term. Their first concert appearance took place in Churchill College the following March, ahead of their public debut at the Sheffield Arts Festival in June - making the Fitzwilliam now one of the longest established string quartets in the world, and possibly unique in having reached a half-century with an original player still on board! The current line-up combines founding member **Alan George** with a younger generation of performers: violinists **Lucy Russell** (herself celebrating 30 years in the group) and **Marcus Barcham Stevens**, along with former Vellinger Quartet cellist **Sally Pendlebury**.

International recognition came early for the FSQ, as the first group to record and perform all fifteen Shostakovich string quartets, drawing on the players' personal connection with the composer. The quartet has since appeared regularly across Britain, Europe, North America, the Middle and Far East, and Southern Africa, as well as making many award winning recordings for Decca, Linn, and Divine Art: perhaps the most novel so far has been a jazz-fusion collaboration with German saxophonist/composer Uwe Steinmetz and former Turtle Island Quartet violinist Mads Tolling; a return to more traditional fare then saw Bruckner's String Quintet coupled with his early Quartet - begun while Jonathan Sparey was nearing the end of his 37 years as second violinist but delayed by his retirement, eventually released thanks to generous sponsorship by the Bruckner Society of America and The Bruckner Journal (UK). Also now available are the complete chamber works (so far!) by award winning English composer Liz Johnson - including a new quintet which requires five different clarinets! Finally, a long term ambition to record Beethoven and Schubert on gut strings - following the success of previous recordings on historical instruments - was finally inaugurated in July, with sessions for the latter's "Death and the Maiden" and A minor quartets (being released as part of the anniversary festivities in February 2020). Thus does the Fitzwilliam remain one of the few prominent quartets to play on older set-ups, yet simultaneously bringing about the addition of over 50 new works to the repertoire.

After graduating from Cambridge in 1971 they accepted their first professional appointment, as Quartet in Residence at the University of York, succeeding the celebrated Amadeus. There, the group built a niche for itself in concert venues around Yorkshire and the rest of the United Kingdom, at the same time joining a select company of quartets to have emerged under the guidance of Sidney Griller at the Royal Academy of Music.

Dmitri Shostakovich with Alan George (1972)

It was only a year into that Residency that the much documented association with Dmitri Shostakovich first catapulted the Quartet into the public eye. The composer travelled to York to hear their second performance of his thirteenth quartet, and this musical friendship (the composer's own word!) prospered through correspondence, and the presentation of his final two quartets, which he wrote in the years immediately following that visit. Sadly, a carefully planned trip to spend a week with the composer in Moscow was necessarily abandoned when he died in August 1975. Benjamin Britten afterwards reported (just before his own death) that Shostakovich had told him the Fitzwilliam were his "preferred performers of my quartets"!

Complete cycles were given in a number of major centres, including London, New York, and Montréal. A new recording of the last three quartets is being specially released by Linn next month to celebrate "FSQ@50" year. Whilst their pre-eminence in the interpretation of Shostakovich has persisted, the authority gained has also been put at the service of diverse other composers, from the early 17th century to the present day. Their involvement in 2013 with celebrating Britten's centenary, and before that the chamber works of Delius and Grainger, are only the more recent manifestations of the players' enthusiasm for using anniversaries to promote less familiar music: following Vaughan Williams in 2008, it would appear that Britain has gradually taken its place alongside Russia and Vienna as a principal area of speciality; while in 2015 they looked further north, to honour the joint 150th birthdays of Glazunov, Sibelius, and Carl Nielsen. Beethoven may well follow in 2020……

Having been Quartet-in-Residence at York for twelve years, at Warwick for three, and at Bucknell (Pennsylvania, USA) from 1978, their university work continues at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge, and now at St Andrews - which incorporates an annual quartet course (alongside their regular coaching weekend at Benslow Music, Herts). They have also been granted their own chamber music festival in the famous "book town" of Hay-on-Wye. The 2018/19 season began with an exceptionally busy September, which included six performances in just one week: a concentration of events to herald the quartet's 50th anniversary season itself (2018/9) - taking in a concert back in Cambridge on March 2nd, 50 years to the day after that debut public performance!

Further information at www.fitzwilliamquartet.com

MUSIC IN PEEBLES - 2019/20 SEASON

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Programme:

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Vivaldi	Concerto in D, Op.3, No.9
Vivaldi	Concerto in A minor, Op.3, No.6
Handel	Concerto Grosso in B flat, Op.6, No.7
Bach	Brandenburg Concerto No.5 in D, BWV1050

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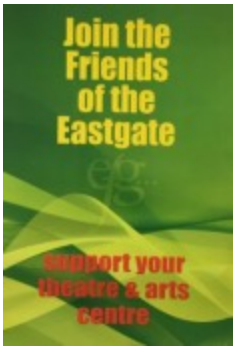

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MUSIC *in* Peebles

Patron: Gina McCormack

2019-20 SEASON

All concerts are in the Eastgate Theatre & Arts Centre,Peebles

Sunday 8 September 2019 at 7.30pm
FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET
Earl of Kellie, Schubert, Shostakovich, Tchaikovsky

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Bach, Vivaldi, Handel

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