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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS INTERNATIONAL CONCERT SERIES

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Clothworkers Centenary Concert Hall

Quatuor Agate

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in memory of Justin Grossman

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Programme

Luigi Boccherini – String Quartet in G minor, Op. 32, No. 5

I. Allegro comodo
II. Andantino
III. Minuetto
IV. Allegro giusto

Béla Bartók – String Quartet No. 6

I. Mesto–Vivace
II. Mesto–Marcia
III. Mesto–Burletta. Moderato
IV. Mesto

Interval

Johannes Brahms – String Quartet in C minor, Op. 51, No. 1

I. Allegro
II. Romanza (Poco adagio)
III. Allegretto molto moderato e comodo
IV. Allegro

Programme Notes

This programme comprises three quartets from three centuries. Each is in four movements; there, however, the resemblance ends. Boccherini employs a standardized order of fast outer movements; the second movement slow, or fairly slow; the third a Minuet with a middle section in the same dance-metre (the section known as “trio” despite being for four instruments or, in symphonies, the whole band). After the “trio”, the Minuet is repeated.

Some 90 years later, Brahms retained this broad scheme for the outer movements, and his second movement is slower; but the third movement is neither a dance nor the faster Scherzo that had replaced the Minuet by this time, and its “trio” is in a different metre. Brahms was considered a conservative, despite the emotional charge of his music, but his quartets were not written to be accessible to amateur performers, as were Boccherini’s, Haydn’s, even Mozart’s; his were intended for professionals and for the concert platform rather than the home; the Op 51 quartets stretch the medium near to its limits.

As, indeed, did Bartók’s six quartets, some of which are dedicated to professional quartets. Only No. 6 is in four movements; its two immediate predecessors, Nos. 4 and 5, have five movements forming symmetrical arches. But No. 6 is no exercise in neo-classicism, and its expressiveness, hardly neo-romantic either, comes from Bartók’s richly inventive interpretation of the various musical idioms of his native Hungary and nearby Romania and Bulgaria, and by his own brand of adventurous modernism.

Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805) – Quartet in G minor, Op. 32, No. 5
I. Allegro comodo; II. Andantino; III. Minuetto; IV. Allegro giusto

Boccherini composed about 100 string quintets, and even his quartets are more plentiful than those of Joseph Haydn. His style could be quirky, but still less adventurous than Haydn’s who, isolated in Eszterháza, was (as he put it) “forced to become original”, whereas Boccherini travelled widely before settling in Madrid. He was patronized by the Spanish court and the cello-playing Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm; Boccherini was himself an excellent cellist. Some influence of Boccherini on early Haydn has been detected, but his generally more suave manner led a violinist contemporary, one Puppo, to call him “Haydn’s wife”!

If this quartet (c. 1780) seems undemanding relative to Haydn's later work, it has its own charm. Boccherini writes with delicacy, and with consideration for all the players: Violin I is first among equals, but the others are all given some prominence, with motifs passed around in free imitation and the cello occasionally ranging into its tenor register. Such a work belies the reputation of minor keys as being "sad".

The first movement is in two repeated sections. Characteristically, the opening is marked "soave" and "dolce" (smoothly, sweetly), terms of which Boccherini seems to have been fond; "dolciss[imo]" is also found for the ornate melodic lines mainly assigned to the first violin. The slow movement, in E flat major, is marked "sempre sotto voce", but nevertheless occasionally rises to a forte. The violin's opening is immediately copied by the cello, far below. After further conversational interplay led by the viola, the opening bars are recapitulated and the movement ends with a coda elaborated by the first violin.

The minor-key Minuet is lively in character (being "con moto", it is no stately Minuet intended for dancing). Its major-key Trio is marked "dolciss. e smorfioso". For the latter, my dictionary offers "affected; mincing; insinuating; wheedling"; listeners may like to decide which is the most appropriate epithet, but might settle on "charming". The finale, again in two repeated sections, is a sonata form in the style of a contredanse (a Frenchified version of "country dance"); this form and sprightly style often appear in finales by Haydn and others. The quiet opening sets off vigorous passage-work from both violins – on paper, their parts are double the length of the lower instruments. Towards the end, the first violin is left unaccompanied for a cadenza ("Capriccio ad libitum"), displaying virtuoso techniques of part-writing, arpeggios and a short Adagio. Following a reprise of the movement's opening, the quartet ends with a vigorous unison.

Julian Rushton

Béla Bartók (1881-1945) – Quartet No. 6

I. Mesto–Vivace; II. Mesto–Marcia; III. Mesto–Burletta. Moderato; IV. Mesto

Bartók began composing what would be his final quartet in August 1939 while staying in the Swiss village of Saanen, in Chalet Aellen, the summer house of Paul Sacher, conductor of the Basle Chamber Orchestra. In a letter to his eldest son, Bartók commented that 'Somehow I felt like a musician of olden times – the invited guest of a patron of the arts. … In a word, I am living alone – in an ethnographic object: a genuine peasant cottage.' He had completed his

Divertimento for String Orchestra (a commission from Sacher) during the first fortnight of August and his attention now turned to the new quartet.

The sketches for the first two movements of the four-movement quartet present a rather different conception to the published version. Perhaps the most striking feature of the composition in its final form is the presence of a kind of ritornello, a deeply expressive 'motto theme' marked *mesto* (sadly) that opens the first movement played by the viola, prefaces the *Marcia* second movement in two-part counterpoint, introduces the *Burletta* in three distinct voices and underpins the entire finale.

Bartók's original intention appears to have been to begin the sonata-form first movement with the lively main theme which now follows the motto theme; the idea of using the motto theme as a means of holding the entire work together didn't solidify until he had commenced work on the second movement. The sketches also indicate that the four-part elaboration, which in the published score forms the bulk of the slow finale, was conceived as the introduction to a fast, folk-inspired movement.

Why then did Bartók alter the shape of the work so significantly? László Somfai is surely correct when he remarks that 'As to the general character and the implicit narrative of the whole composition, it is indeed the recurrences of the ritornello that so dramatically show the colourful 'pictures' or 'scenes' (Movs, I, II, III) to be memories of the past in contrast to the overwhelming pessimism of the present.'

As to the motto theme itself, Gerald Abraham pointed out in 1942 that its opening bore some similarity to the folk song 'Hej, édes anyám' that Bartók had collected in 1914 from Maros-Torda in Transylvania – at that point still part of Hungary, but ceded to Romania after the First World War – slowed down and placed in a more chromatic milieu. Bartók only collected one verse of the lyrics, which present the words of a man who has just been recruited into the Austro-Hungarian army:

> Hey mother, dearest mother mine,
> Get all my robes of mourning,
> Get them, hang them on the nail,
> Alas, for three years I shall not wear them.

If indeed Bartók was consciously alluding to the melody and sentiments of the text of this song, it was clearly apposite given that the political situation in 1939 mirrored that of 1914, though his personal stakes were now significantly higher.

The two main themes of the sonata-form first movement which follows the lamenting motto theme are both influenced by Bartók's interactions with traditional music. The first may have its roots in a folk melody that Bartók recorded at the same time as 'Hej, édes anyám'. Another a soldier's song, it involves a recent recruit telling his lover that he has been coerced into joining up by the local sheriff and that 'my beloved, my pretty, I must march away'. Bartók's melody has two main elements played by the first violin, the first coiling upwards through an octave and the second, several bars later, reversing this motion with a descent from a high D. The movement's contrasting theme is more placid and opens with what might be described as a Hungarian choriambus (long-short-short-long) metre.

The choriambus metre was one of a number of figures found in the genre of Hungarian urban popular music known as *verbunkos*, which developed in the late eighteenth century and was associated with recruitment into the imperial army. Widely performed by Romani bands, *verbunkos* (and developments from it such as the csárdás) came to be seen as the musical embodiment of Hungary and it found its apotheosis in works such as Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies. As an ardent youthful nationalist, Bartók had adopted many of its devices (for instance, in his tone poem *Kossuth* of 1903) but after his discovery of what he regarded as authentic Hungarian folk music around 1905, he largely rejected *verbunkos*. However, in his later years he re-assimilated some aspects of it, at least as performed by rural rather than urban musicians, in works such as this quartet, the Second Violin Concerto (1937-8) and *Contrasts* (1938).

The following two movements, the Marcia and Burletta both employ ternary forms in which the first sections are substantially altered on their reprise. Marcia opens in a resolute march rhythm with an idea similar to that of the first movement of *Contrasts* which is explicitly labelled *Verbunkos*. The middle section looks to a highly improvisatory Romanian vocal form called *hora lungă* (long-drawn song as Bartók translates it), the cellist taking the role of the singer and the rest of the quartet providing animated support, with the viola strumming along like a folk guitarist. From the four-part cadenza that closes the section, the march makes its initially ghostly reappearance. The Burletta is a piece of Bartókian grotesquery, which perhaps recalls'a little tipsy' from his Three Burlesques for piano of 1911. Its grim humour is tempered by the pastoral middle section, in which Bartók briefly alludes to an idea from his *Cantata profana*.

In the beautiful and deeply melancholic finale the motto theme is further developed before a brief reprise of the first movement's two principal ideas, now

slowed down as if the energy has been sucked out of them. This movement and indeed the entire quartet, can surely be regarded as Bartók's personal response to the tragedy of war that had begun to unfold around him.

David Cooper

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) – Quartet in C minor, Op. 51, No. 1
I. Allegro; II. Romanza (Poco adagio); III. Allegretto molto moderato e comodo; IV. Allegro

Brahms was not one to keep scraps of paper in case a jotting might prove useful later on. However, he is known to have made several attempts at writing string quartets before satisfying himself that he had achieved something worthy of publication. It is surely significant that the genres most associated with Beethoven were the string quartet and symphony (with which Brahms also struggled at first). Eventually his exacting standards were met, and two quartets appeared as in 1873 as Opus 51, the year he turned forty. Only one more, Op. 67, was to follow; his other chamber works without piano are quintets or sextets.

Like the First Symphony, which is in the same key, the C minor quartet magnificently overcomes Brahms's inhibitions about the genre. Both works are of remarkable emotional intensity in the outer movements, and in the quartet it sometimes feels that a second viola or cello might have eased the strain (Brahms's earlier string sextets are less stressful). But there is a positive side to high intensity, and the associated challenge to the performers: a driving engagement with our feelings comparable to quartets by other composers living in Vienna from Schubert to Schoenberg. The latter, moreover, challenged Brahms's conservative reputation with a Brahms centenary essay "Brahms the Progressive" (1933); he and his student Webern were fascinated by the opening pages of this quartet.

What appealed to Brahms's successors is his anticipation of an aspect of their own modernism: tonal/harmonic instability. The music soon, and twice, comes to a halt, only to resume in the "wrong" key before gathering itself to reach the relative major, E flat, promptly darkened by its own "parallel" minor. There is only a little relief from this harmonic restlessness in the closing stages of the exposition, where the first violin takes flight for a few bars. The central section ("development") has the viola play the theme beneath rustling violins; the dynamic fluctuations fully match those of the harmony. The disguised recapitulation of the opening is followed by further developments and a coda, quieter music predominating as if passions are, for a time, exhausted.

The second movement, “Romanza”, provides a welcome contrast of mood by its major key, triple metre, and slower tempo. Yet its gentler melody and harmony notwithstanding, almost every bar of the first section is reminiscent of the dotted rhythm of the first movement. The second idea is more hesitant, punctuated by silences; but confidence is restored by a return to the opening, with added decoration from the first violin. After a reprise of the second idea, the cello’s pizzicato chords signal a delicately teasing close.

Brahms was somewhat averse to the fast “Scherzo” generally favoured in the nineteenth century. This third movement is only moderately fast, and in a duple metre; “comodo” suggests “comfortably”. The violin forms a melody out of a sighing two-note figure, but the viola, beneath, offers a more serene alternative which is taken up by the cello when the sighing motif is rested. But there is of course a reprise, and the sighing motif almost has the last word. In the middle section, meanwhile, the mood changes completely with the major key, triple time, and a slightly faster tempo, a “trio” that feels like a pastoral scene; its melody unfolds over an almost continual high drone, mainly in the second violin: a single note is reiterated across two strings, the device known as “bariolage”. A brief shadow is cast over the rustic scene as a transition to the reprise of the whole first section.

In several works Brahms followed a tendency of his time, by which multi-movement works show clear connections between their outer movements. Sometimes this is literally a memory just before the close, as in the third symphony and the clarinet quintet. Here, however, the unmistakable connection is between the opening themes of the first and last movements; the finale’s opening gesture, a main theme rather than a mere memory, uses the dotted rhythm and the melodic intervals of the first movement. At least one idea, marked più tranquillo, almost harks back to the “Romanza”; the finale admits such gentler contrasts, more willingly than the first movement, albeit, in this case, with an obvious connection to the main theme whose challenge is never silent for long. Shortly before the end, the concept of the string quartet as a friendly conversation of equals threatens to turn into an outright argument; after a quick exchange of fire between violins and the lower instruments, Brahms accelerates, to end in unanimity with three decisive chords.

Julian Rushton

Quatuor Agate

Adrien Jurkovic (violin) **Thomas Descamps** (violin)
Raphaël Pagnon (viola) **Simon Iachemet** (cello)

Formed in 2016, the Paris-based Quatuor Agate studied at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin with Eberhard Feltz, in Paris under the guidance of Mathieu Herzog, and with the Quatuor Ebène at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich. In 2021, they were prize-winners at the Young Classical Artists Trust International Auditions.

Highlights this season include debut recitals at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Alte Oper Frankfurt and the Lammermuir Festival in Scotland. They return to Wigmore Hall and collaborate with the Modigliani Quartet at the Tauber Philharmonie and the Diotima Quartet at the Lange Nacht der Streichquartette in Munich. In 2023 they record the complete Brahms Quartets for the Naïve label.

Over the last year the Quatuor Agate has made their debut at Wigmore Hall and given recitals across Europe at the Konzerthaus Dortmund, Brucknerhaus Linz, Tauber Philharmonie Weikersheim, the Verbier, Salon-de-Provence, Radio France and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festivals. They recorded with Frank Braley and Gabriel Le Magadure for the Naïve label due for release in Spring 2023.

The Quartet is artist in residence at the Fondation Singer Polignac, resident at Pro-Quartet in Paris, and Associate Artist at the Festival la Brėche in Savoie. In 2016 they founded the CorsiClassic Festival. The Quartet were prize-winners at the 2022 Banff International Competition (Canadian Commission Prize), the 2019 Verbier Festival Academy, and the 2020 Steels-Wilsing Foundation Competition at the Heidelberger Frühling Festival.

All four members of the Agate are from the South of France. It was their love for Berlin, and its rich and dynamic culture that brought them together as a Quartet.

The Quatuor Agate are Lauréats of the Fondation Banque Populaire. They are grateful for support from the Günther-Caspar Stiftung.

https://quatuoragate.com

In memory of Justin Grossman

Justin came to the Department of Social Sciences in 1960 as a temporary lecturer in public administration. After doctoral work at the LSE he was on his way back to his native United States, where he had earlier held posts as research assistant at UCLA and as a field representative of the California Committee for fair employment practices. It was Leeds' good fortune that he was persuaded to stay by Professor Grebenik, who recognised at once his exceptional qualities as a teacher and departmental colleague.

From 1962 until his early retirement Justin was responsible for the teaching of political and social theory, a task to which he brought both philosophical rigour and historical breadth, a combination of the highest academic standards with a deep concern for student welfare. Always generous with his time, he gave the interests of students first claim on his attention, and first priority in the Department's affairs. He served as a mainstay to successive professors in the administration of the Department, acting as Head of Division in 1971-72, and as Head of Department in 1973 and from 1977 to 1980.

It is for his contribution at University level, however, that Justin will be most widely remembered. After service on a number of University committees, he was

elected Dean of Economic and Social Studies from 1972 to 1974, and Chairman of the Board of Faculties from 1978 to 1980, one of the rare examples of a non-professorial appointment to that post. Among other important committees on which he served was the Joint Group on Selective Economies. A person of wide culture, generous sympathies and mature judgement, he had the rare capacity to be critical without causing offence, and to sustain a principle without losing sight of practicalities. He was held in respect and affection by colleagues in all parts of the University.

Justin retired in 1983 after a long and fruitful career. Upon retirement the title and status of Life Fellow was bestowed upon him, and he was a regular and gregarious attender at the Life Fellows' social functions. Even in retirement he continued to take a keen interest in fine art and the University Gallery, and was instrumental in founding, in 1989, the Friends of University Art and Music (Leeds) with Jillian Rennie, Maurice Kirk and Professor Julian Rushton. He continued his association with FUAM for a number of years, guiding its establishment as a charitable trust and serving as a Committee member and later as a Trustee.

Professor David Beetham

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