

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 20 November 2021 7.30pm

20th Anniversary Concert

Sacconi Quartet

Ben Hancox violin

Hannah Dawson violin

Robin Ashwell viola

Cara Berridge cello



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet in E flat K428 (1783)

*I. Allegro non troppo • II. Andante con moto •
III. Menuetto. Allegro - Trio • IV. Allegro vivace*

Jonathan Dove (b.1959)

On The Streets and In The Sky (2020) *world première*

I. Driving • II. Lively • III. Very gently moving

Interval

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

String Quartet No. 2 in A minor Op. 13 (1827)

*I. Adagio - Allegro vivace • II. Adagio non lento •
III. Intermezzo. Allegretto con moto - Allegro di molto •
IV. Presto - Adagio non lento*

Welcome back to Wigmore Hall

We are grateful to our Friends and donors for their generosity as we rebuild a full series of concerts in 2021/22 and reinforce our efforts to reach audiences everywhere through our broadcasts. To help us present inspirational concerts and support our community of artists, please make a donation by visiting our website:

[Wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate). Every gift is making a difference. Thank you.

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.

In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.

Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG

Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



It is hard to imagine a time before the invention of the string quartet, such is the medium's enduring presence at the heart of chamber music. Yet the combination of two violins, viola and cello was in its infancy when Haydn and the 14-year-old Mozart first composed for it. They helped define the best of what it could do, to set the standards for future generations of composers and players. This evening's programme, among other things, rises from the sophisticated textures and timbres that the string quartet has to offer, qualities explored in fine detail by the Sacconi Quartet since its formation and directed by its members to an equally sophisticated and broad range of musical expression. It is fitting, then, that the Sacconi has chosen one of Mozart's 'Haydn' Quartets to open its 20th anniversary concert.

Mozart composed his String Quartet in E flat K428 in Vienna in the summer of 1783, coming closer in it to emulating Haydn's genial warmth and wit than in any other of his 'Haydn' Quartets. Mozart's heartfelt dedicatory letter to Haydn, printed with the six quartets, reflects the affection and esteem shared by the two composers. In it the younger man declared Haydn to be the father of his new works and called on him to be their guide and friend. 'From this moment I surrender to you all my rights in them. I beg you, however, to regard with leniency those faults that may have remained hidden to a father's partial eye, and in spite of them to continue your noble friendship for him who loves you so dearly.'

The 'Haydn' Quartets drew lessons from their spiritual father's 'Russian' Quartets of 1781. They were also influenced by the music of JS Bach and Handel, to which Mozart had recently been introduced by the diplomat and amateur composer Baron Gottfried van Swieten. The E flat Quartet opens with a lyrical melody stated in unison by all four instruments, its plaintive nature offset by the exposition's lively first subject. Although the movement's development section introduces dramatic tension, the shift in mood proves short-lived and is dispelled in a recapitulation marked by crafty variations of material from the exposition. Mozart deploys the tonal richness of sustained four-part writing in the work's hymn-like slow movement, using it at first to introduce an exquisite violin melody and thereafter to explore its infinite textural nuances. Shades of Haydn fleet over the surface of Mozart's *Menuetto*, its rustic revelry launched with a first-fiddle flourish and only partially restrained by the trio section's lurch into more sombre territory. The homage to Haydn continues in the finale, cast in modified sonata form and supercharged with a plethora of Haydnesque effects, momentary hesitations, sweeping dynamic changes and swaggering melodies among them.

Jonathan Dove's close relationship with the Sacconi Quartet was reinforced in 2016 with the ensemble's commission and subsequent recording of *In Damascus*, a song-cycle for tenor and string quartet touched by reflections on Syria's long history and bloody civil war.

On the Streets and In the Sky, written to mark the Quartet's 20th anniversary, was inspired by events closer to home, as the composer explains. 'Lockdown in London in 2020 was a strange time,' he writes. 'Days were filled with anxiety: ordinary daily chores such as a trip to the shops could be deadly. Yet at the same time, without traffic pollution or aeroplanes, the sky over London seemed exceptionally clear and blue. The birds seemed to sing more loudly – or perhaps it was that without the sounds of traffic, we could hear them better. The blue sky and the birdsong contrasted strangely with the uneasiness of life on the ground. They seemed to offer glimpses of a better world.'

The tuneful song of a solitary bird, perched in a tree outside Dove's home, outlined a pentatonic melody. 'I could never see it, hidden in the tree: I guessed that it was a blackbird, but I have no expertise to support that,' he recalls. 'I recorded the unknown bird on a few occasions, and transcribed its song. Around the same time, in a nearby park, a robin impressed me with its unceasing concert, a flow of utterance without any exact repetition. The robin and the unknown bird sing throughout the second movement of this quartet. (My transcriptions of their songs are, of course, an approximation, lower and slower than the real thing.) They form an interlude between the driving, edgy first movement and a serene third movement, suggested by the clear blue sky.' *On the Streets and In the Sky* is dedicated 'to the Sacconi Quartet in celebration of their twentieth anniversary and with gratitude for so many wonderful performances.'

Chamber music and its making were among the advantages delivered to the Mendelssohn children by their parents and wider family. Young Felix received coaching in ensemble performance from the French violinist and composer Pierre Baillot, a former child prodigy noted for the tonal warmth and subtlety of his playing. While **Mendelssohn's** first full-length string quartet, completed within 11 days in 1823, took its lead from Mozart, the String Quartet No. 2 in A minor Op. 13 reflects the composer's close study of Beethoven's late quartets. This second quartet, completed in October 1827, belongs to the musical and aesthetic realm of Beethoven's Op. 132, also conceived in A minor. Mendelssohn repays his debt to the older composer, not least in the slow movement. Here, the intimate, prayer-like quality of the opening section closely echoes the spirit and at one point almost the notes of the *Cavatina* from Beethoven's quartet Op. 130. The movement's central chromatic fugue calls to mind the *fugato* passages from the *Allegretto* of Beethoven's 'Serioso' Quartet Op. 95, while its closing pages evoke the contemplative style of the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' of Beethoven's Op. 132.

© Andrew Stewart 2021

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.