

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 25 November 2021 7.30pm

Danish String Quartet

Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen violin

Frederik Øland violin

Asbjørn Nørgaard viola

Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin cello

Supported by the Rubinstein Circle



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Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)

John Adams (b.1947)

Traditional

Felix Blumenfeld (1863-1931)

John Adams

Marc-Antoine Charpentier

John Adams

Bent Sørensen (b.1958)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

'An alleged suite', a curated suite of dances:

Prelude: Prelude from *Concert pour quatre parties de violes* H545 (1680-1)

Allemande: Pavane: She's So Fine from *John's Book of Alleged Dances* (1994)

Courante: Polska

Sarabande: Sarabande in G minor from *Les vendredis* (pub. 1899)

Gavotte: Stubble Crotchet from *John's Book of Alleged Dances*

Gigue 1: Gigue française from *Concert pour quatre parties de violes* H545

Gigue 2: Toot Nipple from *John's Book of Alleged Dances*

Doppelgänger (2020)

Interval

String Quartet in A Op. 41 No. 3 (1842)

I. Andante espressivo - Allegro molto moderato • II. Assai agitato • III. Adagio molto • IV. Finale. Allegro molto vivace

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The Danish String Quartet's 'Alleged Suite' switches back and forth between around 1680, when **Marc-Antoine Charpentier** supplied his contributions, and 1994, when **John Adams** added his. Charpentier's Concert in D minor, one of few chamber pieces by him, gives us a prelude of noble melancholy.

John Adams pulls away from this rather, but one may say the elegance is still there. Adams's dances are 'alleged', he explains, because the steps for them have yet to be found. Nevertheless, this one has some allegiance to the slow, duple-meter dance of Renaissance courts, as well as to others with origins in barns across the Atlantic.

Courantes come fast or not so fast, but always in triple meter, which allows the Danish Quartet to substitute its arrangement of a *polska*, a Scandinavian tradition of Polish origin. This one comes from Dorotea, in sub-Arctic Sweden, and the quartet takes it very fast, as undoubtedly people here had to.

Sarabandes are always slow. **Felix Blumenfeld** wrote his wistful one in G minor for the Friday musicales hosted by Mitrofan Belyayev, a businessman-patron in St Petersburg who published a set of such pieces in 1899.

Stubble crochet is what you get if you weave your (or someone else's) short beard. Playing on the term, Adams's set gives the musicians a rock gavotte, heavy on the cello.

A suite has to conclude with a gigue. Charpentier offers two: a folksy *anglaise* and a *française* more suave but still buoyant. The Danes choose the latter, but keep the double-gigue pattern by again sampling John Adams's collection, whose 'Toot Nipple' certainly boasting the gigue qualities of exciting compound rhythm and élan.

Bent Sørensen wrote three quartets in quick succession in the 1980s, then added a fourth in 1993, but let more than a quarter-century pass before coming to *Doppelgänger*, which he began in 2019 but mostly wrote last year – and titled for reasons he has explained:

'After my very first première with professional musicians in 1981, I had a very inspiring conversation with the cellist in the ensemble who had performed my piece: "You should listen to the great G major quartet by Schubert," he said. So, I did that, and since then the piece has been one of "my" pieces; and that is probably why I immediately said, "It has to be the G major quartet," when the Danish String Quartet asked me to compose a piece in some way referring to one of the late Schubert quartets.

'It became *Doppelgänger* – and not only because of a kind of relationship to the quartet by Schubert; indeed, the only traces

of Schubert in my piece are some recurring clean and pure G major chords, often transformed – as in the Schubert quartet – to G minor. The title *Doppelgänger* refers more to what is going on inside the music – inside the quartet.

'The piece is in two movements, and between the movements and inside each of them there are musical mirrors. Shadows of music arrive and create new contours. A fugue emerges, and later, when it is played backwards, the fugue can be seen from behind. Here, I was thinking of Schubert and his struggle with writing fugues. A fight I took on...'

Shadows of the past turn to light in the last of the three quartets **Robert Schumann** composed inside 19 days: June 4-22, 1842. As preparation, he had made a thorough study of the quartets of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and of his friend Mendelssohn. When all was done, Mendelssohn's admiration was the ultimate seal of approval, and it was to Mendelssohn that Schumann dedicated the works.

His own ideal was that quartet texture had to be, as he wrote, 'beautiful and even abstrusely woven conversation among four people'. He was concerned, too, as in the symphonies he had begun writing just before, to increase the continuity and wholeness of a four-movement composition – and even of an entire set of works. This third quartet begins with a few bars that seem to be searching for a way to continue a story that had started in the first. The search, however, has already come up with the answer, in its motif of a falling fifth followed by an ornamented further fall, and this motif, gently corrected into clear A major, forms the first theme of a sonata allegro whose second subject is melody streaming on lively syncopation. There is a short development of the first theme, which is abbreviated in the recapitulation so that it can be restored in the coda.

Instead of a scherzo, the work proceeds to a set of variations in the relative minor. Features of the first movement maintain connection: syncopation and the fifth, now rising to kick off a vigorous round as second variation. The slow third variation provides a middle section, followed by the fourth and a coda.

Next comes a slow movement in D, rich and serene – until the viola, alone, sounds a niggle. The upshot is a troubling heartbeat in the second violin, which cannot be soothed. We expect resolution, and we get it, but along with continuing anxiety.

The rondo *Finale* sets out from a chord that reminds us where this quartet started out. But back in A major, and through a 'Quasi Trio' gavotte that appears twice, the music bounds confidently to a conclusion.

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