

ENSEMBLE 360

Friday 3 September

1.00pm & 7.00pm

Upper Chapel, Sheffield

BENJAMIN NABARRO violin
CLAUDIA AJMONE-MARSAN violin
RACHEL ROBERTS viola
GEMMA ROSEFIELD cello

BEETHOVEN String Quartet Op.18 No.6
BEETHOVEN String Quartet Op.131

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet in B flat Op.18 No.6

Allegro con brio
Adagio ma non troppo
Scherzo. Allegro
La Malinconia. Adagio – Allegretto quasi allegro

Composed in the spring or summer of 1800, and the last of the Op.18 set to be written, the B flat String Quartet opens with a movement full of youthful exhilaration, starting with a lively dialogue between first violin and cello. The contrasting material, though less animated, maintains the essential optimism of the music. The Adagio opens with a theme of almost operatic lyricism that contrasts with a more austere and mysterious second idea in the minor key, initially presented in bare octaves. The Scherzo is notable for its rhythmic energy even when the music is quiet, with many exciting and unexpected accents, contrasting with the bustling, violin-dominated Trio. Nowhere are the emotional extremes of this quartet more apparent than in the finale. Its slow introduction, 'La Malinconia' ('melancholy', or even 'despondency'), is instructed to be played 'with the greatest delicacy' and includes some of the most daring and adventurous harmonies to be found anywhere in early Beethoven. What follows could hardly be more different: a playful Allegretto that almost suggests a quick waltz – with at its centre a startling, powerful reminiscence of the 'Malinconia' music, before a return, hesitant at first, of the dance-like faster music.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet in C sharp minor Op.131

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo
Allegro molto vivace
Allegro moderato
Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Presto
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro

Beethoven himself considered the C sharp minor Quartet to be his finest work: an immense single span comprising seven movements that are performed without a break. When Richard Wagner heard the work performed by the Maurin-Chevillard Quartet in Paris, he was overcome with admiration. It's always fascinating to read one great composer writing about another, and despite the purple prose, Wagner's remarks are a wonderful tribute. He likens the Quartet to a 'Beethoven day', and describes the music as follows:

I should designate the long introductory Adagio – than which, probably, nothing more melancholy has ever been expressed in sound – as the awakening on the morning of a day ... It is, at the same time, a penitential prayer, a conference with God. The introspective eye views (Allegro, 6/8) there, too, the comforting phenomenon in which Desire becomes a sweet, sorrowful play with itself: the innermost dream-image awakens in a most charming reminiscence. And now (in the short transitional Allegro moderato) it is as though the Master, recollecting his art, addressed himself to his

magic work. He employs (Andante, 2/4) the revived power of spells peculiarly his own, to charm a graceful shape ... in order that he may enrapture himself by ever new and unprecedented transformations ... We now fancy (Presto 2/2) that we see him who is so completely happy, cast a glance of indescribable serenity upon the outer world. ... Everything is rendered luminous by his inner happiness. ... He now reflects on how he must begin (Adagio, 3/4), a short but troubled meditation ... He awakens, and now strikes the strings for a dance, in such a way as the world has never yet heard (Allegro Finale). It is the dance of the world itself: wild delight, the lamentation of anguish, ecstasy of love, highest rapture ... and sorrow: suddenly, lightning quivers, the angry tempest growls; and above all this, the mighty player ... smiles at himself, for the incantation was to him, after all, only a play. Night beckons to him. His day is finished.

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ENSEMBLE 360

Ensemble 360 has gained an enviable reputation across the UK not only for the quality and integrity of its playing, but also for its ability to communicate the music to a range of different audiences. Formed in 2005, 11 musicians of international standing came together to take up residency in Sheffield with Music in the Round, establishing a versatile group of five string players, five wind players and a pianist. The musicians believe that concerts should be informal, friendly and relaxed occasions, and perform 'in the round' wherever possible.

Outside Ensemble 360 many of the musicians have highly successful careers, performing with groups including the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, English National Opera, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Camerata Bern, Manchester Camerata and Nash Ensemble.

MUSIC IN THE ROUND

Music in the Round is the leading national promoter of chamber music. For over 35 years we have been bringing people and music closer together through our friendly and informative style of 'in the round' performances, touring to numerous venues around the country as well as presenting two concert series and the Sheffield Chamber Music Festival each year at our home venue, the Crucible Studio. Our concerts are characterised by passion, excellence and proximity, and even in these challenging times of a global pandemic we have been striving to connect people through music by presenting socially-distanced live concerts and creating films featuring our musicians to enjoy online.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING MUSIC IN THE ROUND

Your generosity in the last year has made it possible for us to continue with our aim to bring people closer to music, despite all the challenges of the last 18 months. It is thanks to you, our Friends, supporters and audiences, that we are able to bring you such a full programme this season.

These programmes are produced by Music in the Round. Your donations towards the cost of the commissioning high quality programme notes are very gratefully received, especially given the challenges of recent times.

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