

ENSEMBLE 360

Saturday 5 February

7.00-8.45pm

Upper Chapel, Sheffield



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

BEETHOVEN
String Quartet Op.18 No.3
String Quartet Op.95 *Serioso*
interval
String Quartet Op.59 No.1

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet in D Op.18 No.3

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro

Presto

The Quartet Op.18 No.3 is a landmark in Beethoven's career: it's his first string quartet. He began it in the autumn of 1798, finishing it early the following year, and eventually placed it as the third of the Op.18 set. As a preparation, Beethoven immersed himself in quartets by other composers, especially Mozart and his teacher Haydn – he copied out two of Mozart's "Haydn" quartets just as he was beginning work on his Op.18. The first movement opens with an arching theme (characterised by a leap of a minor seventh between the first two notes). The slow movement, in B flat major, begins with a luxuriant presentation of the main theme, but the texture soon becomes more spare and fragmented, with numerous dramatic contrasts. The Scherzo-like third movement has a minor key Trio section, while the final Presto is notable for its unquenchable energy. Composer and broadcaster Robert Simpson wrote that this music "flies at once into the sky, alighting when and where it wishes" – from the stormy development section to the unexpectedly quiet ending.

String Quartet in F minor Op.95 '*Serioso*'

Allegro con brio

Allegretto ma non troppo, attacca subito

Allegro assai vivace ma serio – Più allegro

Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato – Allegro

"The Quartet is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public." Thus wrote Beethoven to Sir George Smart in October 1816. The kind of public concerts he had in

mind – mixed programmes of vocal and instrumental music – would indeed make an odd setting for a work of such concentrated intensity. Composed in 1810 and revised for publication in 1815, Beethoven dedicated it to his friend, Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovetz, a talented amateur cellist who worked as Hungarian Court Secretary in Vienna.

One of Beethoven's shortest and most tautly argued quartets, it was the composer himself who named it 'Quartetto serio' on the autograph manuscript. William Kinderman, pianist and an international authority on Beethoven's music, sums up its character as "dark, introspective, and vehement", and it's no surprise that Beethoven takes a similarly pithy approach to form: a much-shortened recapitulation in the first movement, a slow movement that eschews lyricism in favour of a chromatic fugal section, and a prickly Scherzo (more of an anti-Scherzo really, since it is not only completely lacking in any kind of humour, but is even marked '*serioso*'). The finale sustains this tension and agitation until the last moment – then something extraordinary happens: the music takes a sudden turn to F major, and there's a dash to the finish. The American composer Randall Thompson commented that "no bottle of champagne was ever uncorked at a better time".

String Quartet in F Op.59 No.1 '*Rasumovsky*'

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto –

Thème Russe. Allegro

The first of Beethoven's three quartets written for Prince Rasumovsky was composed in 1806 and performed the next year. It marks a departure from the Op.18 set in several respects, one of which is its sheer scale: like the '*Eroica*' Symphony (1804–5) it shows

Beethoven expanding the possibilities of the form to produce something on an epic scale while retaining the essential intimacy of a string quartet. The first movement is introduced by a cello theme that American musicologist Lewis Lockwood describes as "opening up a musical space of seemingly unbounded lyricism and breadth". The Scherzo, in B flat major, is an unusual movement: while it has no distinct Trio section, it is also Beethoven's longest Scherzo to date, even though Beethoven removed a large repeat while revising the work. The slow movement has the unusual marking 'mesto' – 'mournful' – and is cast in the tragic key of F minor. It ends on a trill that leads seamlessly into the finale. This is based on a Russian theme – a charming and appropriate choice since Rasumovsky was the Russian Ambassador to Vienna at the time.

Programme notes © Nigel Simeone

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 and presenting the Sheffield Chamber Music Festival each year at our home venue, the Crucible Studio, and concert series across the city and South Yorkshire. Our events 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 recent years has made it possible for us to continue with our aim to bring people closer to music, despite all the challenges since March 2020. It is thanks to you, our Friends, supporters and audiences, that we are able to continue to bring you concerts and a Festival this year.

These programmes are produced by Music in the Round and your donations are gratefully received. You can text 'Programme 1' to 70085 to donate £1.

*This costs you £1 plus standard message rate.