



PROGRAMME
NOTES
24th February 2018

The Maxwell Quartet
Colin Scobie (violin) George Smith (violin)
Elliott Perks (viola) Duncan Strachan (cello)

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
Quartet Op 76, No. 2 (1797/1798)

1. Allegro
2. Andante o più tosto allegretto
3. Menuetto. Allegro ma non troppo
4. Vivace assai

Dedicated to the Hungarian count Joseph Georg von Erdödy (1754–1824), Haydn's six String Quartets Op. 76 form the last complete set of his string quartets, and are among his most renowned and ambitious chamber works. They deviate more than their predecessors from standard sonata form and each emphasizing their thematic continuity through the seamless and near-continual exchange of motifs between instruments. At the time of the commission, Haydn was employed at the court of Prince Nicolaus Esterházy II, and was composing the oratorio *The Creation* as well as Princess Maria Hermenegild Esterházy's annual mass.

The first movement is in D minor, common time and sonata form. The falling fifths motif dominates the exposition and is featured heavily in the development using inversion, stretto and other devices. The second movement is a ternary variation form in D major and 6/8 time. The third movement, a D minor minuet in 3/4 time with trio in D major, has been called the "Witches' Minuet" ("*Hexenminuet*"). The minuet is a two-part canon: the two violins play (in parallel octaves) above the viola and cello (also playing in parallel octaves) who follow one measure behind the violins. Haydn previously used a two-part canon with the lower string trailing the upper strings by a single bar in the minuet of his 44th Symphony. The last movement, in D minor and 2/4 time, uses sonata allegro form. It ends in D major.

Joseph Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Quartet in F major (1903)

1. Allegro moderato – *très doux* 2. *Assez vif* – *très rythmé* 3. *Très lent* 4. *Vif et agité*

Dedicated to Fauré, Ravel's teacher and friend, this quartet has superficial resemblances to Debussy's **String Quartet**, written ten years earlier. Although Ravel's quartet is structurally modelled on Debussy's, each composer's musical ideas were contrasted with the other's. While Debussy is, "effusive, uninhibited, and open[ing] up fresh paths (Orenstein)", Ravel displays emotional reticence and innovation within traditional forms. Ravel followed a direction he described as "opposite to that of Debussy's symbolism", abandoning "the vagueness and formlessness of the early French impressionists in favour of a return to classic standards."

When it was premiered in Paris on 5 March 1904, the critics were divided on the merits of the work. Pierre Lalo, already a staunch opponent of Ravel, dismissed it as derivative ("it offers an incredible resemblance to the music of M. Debussy"), but Jean Marnold of the *Mercure de France* praised the work and described Ravel as "one of the masters of tomorrow". By 1914, the work was well established, and has remained, in Orenstein's phrase, "a standard work in the chamber music repertory".

The first movement is in sonata form, with two contrasting themes. The development section is predominantly lyrical, gaining intensity before the recapitulation. The pace slows and the movement ends very quietly. The second movement is scherzo, and opens with a pizzicato passage. This first theme is in the Aeolian mode, and some writers detect the influence of the Javanese gamelan, which had greatly impressed both Debussy and Ravel when heard in Paris in 1889. The central section of the music is a slow, wistful theme led by the cello. Ravel uses cross rhythms, with figures in triple time played at the same time as figures in double time. The key varies from A minor to E minor and G sharp minor. The movement concludes with a shortened reprise of the opening section. The third movement has numerous changes of tempo. The viola introduces the first theme, which the first violin then repeats. There are strong thematic links with the first movement, and, in defiance of orthodox rules of harmony, conspicuous use of consecutive fifths. The music is rhapsodic and lyrical; it begins and ends in G sharp major with passages in A minor and D minor. The finale reverts to the F major of the first movement. It is loosely in the form of a rondo. The opening bars are stormy, and the movement, though short, has several changes of time signature. Short melodic themes are given rapid tremolandi and sustained phrases are played against emphatic arpeggios. There are brief moments of calm sections, including a reference to the first subject of the opening movement. The turbulence of the opening bars of the finale reasserts itself, and the work ends vigorously.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Quartet No. 1 in D (1871)

1. Moderato e **semplice** (D major) 2. Andante **cantabile** (B flat major)
3. **Scherzo**. Allegro non tanto e con fuoco – Trio (D minor)
4. Finale. Allegro giusto – Allegro vivace (D major)

This quartet was the first of Tchaikovsky's three completed **string quartet** that were published during his lifetime. The melancholic second movement, which has become famous in its own right, was based on a **folk song** the composer heard at his sister's house at Kamenka. When the quartet was performed at a tribute concert for **Leo Tolstoy**, the author was said to have been brought to tears by this movement. "... Tolstoy, sitting next to me and listening to the Andante of my First Quartet, burst into tears". When the **Zoellner Quartet**, at her request, performed the second movement for **Helen Keller**, who rested her fingertips on a resonant tabletop to sense the vibrations, she, too, reacted strongly. The melody from the second theme of the andante cantabile, in **D flat major**, was also used as the basis for the popular song "On the Isle of May", popularized by **Connee Boswell** in 1940.

The quartet's first movement is written in the classical sonata form and here Tchaikovsky managed to keep within its bounds more so than in many of his other works. It opens with a gently lyrical line that transits into a livelier second theme. The development section features a rich interplay between the instruments and has a hurried character that is difficult to describe. The first subject then returns with accompaniment from the first violin, followed by the second theme and a vibrant coda. The second movement, marked andante cantabile, is played on muted instruments in B flat. The main theme comes from folk song that Tchaikovsky heard from a carpenter while he was in Kamenka a few years earlier. A transition to the second theme follows, where the first violin sings over plucked notes from the cello. A return to the first theme rounds out the movement and finally drifts off into a calm but hesitant coda. The third movement, scherzo in D minor, opens with a forceful theme with the character of a vibrant and highly punctuated dance. The internal trio section in B flat features wandering melodies over a circling cello figure that maintains the tension and focus. A return to the opening's pressing dance follows and closes the movement. The finale returns to the home key of D and consists of two thoroughly developed themes. The first, in D major, is bright and emphatic while the second, in B flat, has a lyrical and dreamy feel. The two subjects are weaved together in an imaginative fashion that creates interesting contrast. Finally, a rushing and short-lived recapitulation twists the two themes together and ends in firm resolution.

Musicians

The Maxwell Quartet is formed of four close friends, who grew up playing folk and classical music together across Scotland. Winners of the First and Audience Prizes at the Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition in 2017, and hailed as “brilliantly fresh, unexpected and exhilarating” by The Scottish Herald, and “superb storytelling by four great communicators” by The Strad Magazine, the quartet is now regarded as one of Britain’s finest string quartets. They were praised for their “unaffected enthusiasm” (North Highland Times) and their “panache and conviction” (Strathearn Herald).

Colin Scobie (violin) studied at St Mary’s Music School, Edinburgh, and the Royal College of Music, London. He is already established as one of the most creative and compelling violinists and chamber musicians of his generation. He has performed as concerto soloist to critical acclaim across Europe and further afield.

George Smith (violin) is a founding member of the Quartet, and has performed regularly as a chamber musician and soloist. George works with many other groups in Scotland including the Scottish Ensemble, and also with non-classical musicians. He teaches at various Scottish institutions, and gives workshops and master classes on Scottish music.

Elliott Perks (viola) studied at the Yehudi Menuhin School, and the Royal College of Music, London. He has taken part in numerous concerts as a soloist and chamber musician in most London venues, including The Wigmore Hall, The Royal Festival Hall and The Royal Albert Hall.

Duncan Strachan (cello), winner of the WCOM Busenhart-Morgan Evans Award, and a Waddell Prize, studied at St Mary's Music, Oxford University, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and has worked with many prominent ensembles and composers.



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