

Friday 29 November, 7.30pm, Baptist Church

Maggini String Quartet

Julian Leaper, violin, Ciaran McCabe, violin

Martin Outram, viola, Michal Kaznowski, cello

Ludwig Beethoven (1770-1827) String Quartet in F, op.18 no.1

Frank Bridge (1879-1941) String Quartet no.1 "Bologna" (1906)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) String Quartet no.6 in F, op.80

Formed in 1988, the Maggini Quartet is one of the finest British string quartets. Its acclaimed recordings have won international awards including Gramophone Chamber Music Award of the Year, Diapason d'Or of the Year and a Cannes Classical Award, and they have twice been nominated for Grammy Awards. The Quartet's most recent project has been recording the complete Mendelssohn quartet cycle for Meridian Records. The Quartet's commitment to new music has led to important commissions by James MacMillan, Robert Simpson, Eleanor Alberga and Roxanna Panufnik. Their collaboration with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies in his ten 'Naxos Quartets' was hailed as "a 21st century landmark".

The Quartet appears frequently in prestigious concert series at home and abroad and makes regular media broadcasts. Recent international visits have included Dubai, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany and France. They also have an annual summer tour in Norway and returned to Denmark for a major tour in 2017.

The Maggini are renowned for their interpretations of British repertoire and 'The Glory of the English String Quartet' continues to be an important ongoing initiative, drawing upon the wonderful repertoire which the Quartet is committed to bringing to a worldwide audience. In addition to their concert activity, the members of the Quartet have an international reputation as chamber music coaches. They hold several UK residencies and have worked at the UK's senior music institutions.

Ludwig Beethoven (1770-1827) String Quartet in F, op.18 no.1

1. *Adagio con brio*

2. *Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato*

3. *Scherzo: Allegro molto (F major)*

4. *Allegro (F major)*

This quartet was written by Beethoven between 1798 and 1800, published in 1801, and dedicated, like the rest of the op.18 quartets, to his noble friend and patron, Joseph Franz von Lobkowitz. It is actually the second string quartet that Beethoven composed and consists of four movements.

According to Beethoven's friend Karl Amenda, the second movement was inspired by the tomb scene from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The quartet was heavily revised between the version that Amenda first received and the one that was sent to the publisher a year later, including changing the second movement's marking from *Adagio molto* ('very slow') to the more specific *Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato* ('slow – affecting and passionate'). Of these modifications, Beethoven wrote: "Be sure not to hand on to anybody your quartet, in which I have made some drastic alterations. For only now have I learnt to write quartets; and this you will notice, I fancy, when you receive them."

The theme of the finale is almost directly borrowed from the finale of his earlier string trio, Op.9, No.3 in C minor; the themes are very closely related. The principal theme of the first movement echoes that of Haydn's op.50 no.1 quartet.

The "Amenda" manuscript, as it is sometimes known, was edited by Paul Mies and published by Bärenreiter around 1965, and by Henle-Verlag of Munich (perhaps also edited by Mies) in 1962.

Frank Bridge (1879-1941) String Quartet no.1 "Bologna" (1906)

1. *Adagio – Allegro appassionato*

2. *Adagio molto*

3. *Allegretto grazioso – Animato*

4. *Allegro agitato – Allegretto moderato – Adagio molto*

Bridge was born in Brighton, learned to play violin from his father, and studied at the Royal College of Music from 1899 to 1903 under Charles Villiers Stanford and others. He had much early exposure to practical musicianship, playing in theatre orchestras his father conducted. During his professional life

he played the viola in a number of string quartets, most notably the English String Quartet, and conducted, sometimes deputising for Henry Wood, before devoting himself to composition, receiving the patronage of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. He privately tutored a number of pupils, most famously Benjamin Britten, who later championed his teacher's music and paid homage to him in the *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* (1937), based on a theme from the second of Bridge's *Three Idylls for String Quartet* (1906). Bridge died in Eastbourne.

Among Bridge's works are the orchestral *The Sea* (1911), *Oration* (1930) for cello and orchestra and the opera *The Christmas Rose* (premiered in 1932), but he is perhaps most highly regarded today for his chamber music. When Frank Bridge's chamber music first appeared, it was a revelation to amateurs as well as professional players. All four string quartets that Bridge produced are well regarded and closely trace his development as a composer. His early works are in a late-Romantic idiom, and the first quartet from 1906 is such an example but not written in the pastoral style associated with the quartets of his contemporaries such as Howells, Delius and Vaughan Williams. Later pieces such as the third (1926) and fourth (1937) string quartets are harmonically advanced and very distinctive.

Bridge's First String Quartet is a darkly emotional work infused with yearning and mystery with an undercurrent of melancholy. This agitated quartet does not sound like the work of a happy and contented man. There is a sense that something important was concerning the composer at the time. It was composed in 1906 for a competition held by the Accademia Filarmonica Bologna, hence its sub-title. Though it did not win, it was the only other work singled out and received a Mention d'honneur. By the time he came to write the work, he had already composed several compositions for string quartet, including his Phantasy Quartet as well as his Novellettes and Idylls. To meet the deadline he dashed off the whole work in a matter of weeks though it is impossible to tell this from hearing it.

The first movement begins with a brief *Adagio* introduction before the main part, a passionate *Allegro*, based on a chromatic scale which helped to produce what were for the time unusual harmonies. The second movement is a heart-felt *Adagio molto* ('very slow') with great depth of expression. This is followed by an affable, winsome scherzo, marked *Allegretto grazioso* ('quite quick and graceful'). *Scherzo* means literally 'a joke' and this can indicate humour (subtle or broad) or boisterousness, or simply a contrast to the mood of the rest of the work. Scherzo often implies that the form of the piece, like its predecessor, the Minuet, has a first section A, in which sections are repeated, followed by a contrasting section B called a *Trio*, again with repeated sections, concluded with a reprise of A without repeats. The main theme from the first movement makes an appearance in this movement and also in the wide-ranging and dramatic finale, *Allegro agitato* ('quickly and agitated').

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) String Quartet no.6 in F, op.80

- 1. *Allegro vivace assai* ('very fast and vivacious')**
- 2. *Allegro assai* (very fast')**
- 3. *Adagio* ('slow')**
- 4. *Finale: allegro molto* ('very fast')**

It is often said that if Mozart and Mendelssohn had both died at the age of 20, Mendelssohn would have been accounted by far the greater composer – for though both of them were prodigies who wrote copious music from an early age, Mendelssohn's early works surpass Mozart's in both substance and originality. It was only later that Mozart's genius came to full fruition, while in the view of many critics Mendelssohn never surpassed his teenaged achievements in works like the String Octet or the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. From his earliest years he seemed to have a natural affinity for string instruments, as is well illustrated by the twelve-and-a-bit Sinfonias for string orchestra he wrote between the ages of 12 and 14 (student works half-way between Baroque symphonies and string quartets writ large) and the aforementioned String Octet, written at age 16, essentially conceived as a symphony-like double string quartet.

Mendelssohn's compositions for string quartet proper are probably less familiar these days than they were in the 19th century, when they were influential models, almost universally admired for their deft handling of structure, their amazingly assured writing for strings, and their fine, aristocratic style.

These are qualities that can never really go out of fashion, but they deserve to be discovered afresh by each new generation of listeners.

On 12 May 1847 Mendelssohn, whose health was already delicate, collapsed in shock, unconscious, at hearing of the death of his sister Fanny. He never entirely recovered, and confessed that he 'could not think of work, or even music, without feeling the most intense emptiness and barrenness in the mind and heart'. The following month he travelled to Interlaken in Switzerland. Here he seemed to rally and, by the time of his return to Leipzig in July, he had composed some portions of both an oratorio and an opera, plus an entire string quartet and two movements of another. The complete work, **String Quartet No.6 in F minor, Op.80**, was the first he had written in nine years and incomparably the most important of these productions. It was destined to be the last work he finished; in September he suffered another collapse and wrote nothing more before his death on 4 November. The quartet was not published until three years later. Despite being the last completed utterance of someone who was by any standard a major quartet composer, it has remained sadly neglected.

+ **Purcell School** in November or December