

Marmen Quartet

Pittville Pump Room
Monday 8 July

Claude Debussy	String Quartet in G minor op.10	25'
Toru Takemitsu	A Way a lone	12'
Ludwig van Beethoven	String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2 "Razumovsky"	37'

About the Programme

Claude Debussy String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10

Animé et tres décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino, doucement expressif

Moderato – Très animé

Debussy completed his only String Quartet in 1893, a year before L'après-midi d'un Faune. The influence of César Franck, one of his teachers at the Paris Conservatoire, is significant – for example in the technique of binding works together by the migration and transformation of motto-themes, and in the penchant for letting melodies centre themselves on a recurring note of the scale, as in the quartet's slow movement.

Debussy's 'motto' is immediately heard as the principle subject, and its very décidé nature announced by its unanimous chording; it is made memorable by the dropping down of the leading note (a feature which enables Debussy to present its various keys) and by the somewhat Spanish turn in its fast triplet. The main secondary theme, short and expressive, develops a triplet of its own, its onset being signposted by a momentary unison pause on the violins. But the ebb and flow of the music depends more on fluctuations of speed and texture than of "arguments" between themes.

The scherzando, dance-like nature of the second movement is established by the prevalence of pizzicato, against which stands out the insistent viola part, an adaptation of the motto. The contrast when all but the cello play with the bow is obvious, as the first violin delivers not a new tune but a delicious elongation of the motto. Mutes for all lend an ethereal distance to the melody of the slow movement, whose middle section grows out of a viola solo, reminiscent of the motto, initially only to the extent of its triplets, but becoming more akin to its shape when second violin and cello initiate a drive towards the movement's climax.

The last movement begins with a slow introduction based on a motto-adaptation on the cello with mysterious chordal answers, and then a return to the dance-world of the second movement comes to nothing. The movement proper draws heavily on the motto. The feeling of homecoming is achieved by the unanimous chording as in the opening of the whole quartet, with undeniable references to the joys of the second movement's dance.

Toru Takemitsu *A Way a Lone*

Toru Takemitsu was the leading Japanese composer of the 20th century. He bridged very successfully the traditions of his native culture and those of the West, bringing together two very different musical and aesthetic worlds. The originality of his approach to composition and style may rest partly with the fact that he was largely self-taught. He exhibits little dependence on traditional harmony, rhythm, metre or structure. Suggestions of Schoenberg and the New Viennese School, and the French impressionists, from Debussy to Messiaën, are often apparent. He himself said that he composed "to give a proper meaning to the streams of sound which penetrate the world around us". Indeed, for his works he frequently chose titles from nature: November Steps; Rain Coming; Tree Line; Rain Spell; All in Twilight, etc.

This one movement string quartet, lasting about twelve and a half minutes, was written in 1981, especially for the 10th anniversary of the Tokyo Quartet. The enigmatic title *A Way a Lone* in itself makes little sense, but it conjures up several images which the listener may derive in a personal way from the music, with its atmospheric sounds and moments of silence. Marked *moderato* throughout, a feeling of anguish is never far from the surface, and rarely is there animation present in the music, but the players are required to exercise themselves with almost every technical device in the book.

Ludvig van Beethoven String Quartet No. 8 in E minor op.59 no.2 "Razumovsky"

Allegro

Molto adagio

Scherzo – allegro

Presto

Composed in 1806, this is the second of the three quartets dedicated to Count Razumovsky, the Russian Ambassador in Vienna and a keen musician. The opening chords ("like the sharp cry of an anxious soul", said composer Vincent d'Indy) are followed by a quiet, questioning figure and a typical silence. This juxtaposition is a feature of middle and late-period Beethoven, and the miniature drama of the opening bars is expanded and developed in the course of the movement.

The slow movement is serene, even devotional, at the start, but develops unease and never quite recovers its initial mood. The *Allegretto* third movement is a bleak scherzo dominated by a dominant eleventh chord – an incredible dissonance in Beethoven's time. In the contrasting Trio, Beethoven meets the Count's requirement for the inclusion of a Russian theme by setting the Russian patriotic hymn Slava (Glory), traditionally used to accompany the Tsar's arrival, against insignificant countermelodies; was he mocking authority?

In the robust *Presto* sonata-rondo finale, containing a theme with an irregular rhythm, the struggle for supremacy between two keys, C major and E minor, is resolved only in the coda.

Artist Biography

Marmen Quartet

With the courage, vitality and intensity of its performances, the Marmen Quartet is fast establishing itself as one of the most impressive and engaging talents in chamber music, demonstrated by recent first prizes at the prestigious Bordeaux and Banff International String Quartet Competitions.

The quartet has performed at leading European venues including Wigmore Hall, Berlin Philharmonie, Frankfurt Alte Oper, Stockholm Konserthuset and Muziekgebouw Eindhoven, with festival appearances at BBC Proms, Rheingau and Heidelberg festivals and the Amsterdam and Gulbenkian Foundation String Quartet Biennales.

Committed to new music, the quartet has given the world premieres of several commissions, including Salina Fisher's *Heal*, composed for them in the wake of the pandemic, and Hannah Kendall's *How ruin nested inside each thimble'd throat / & made it sin*. Most recently they gave the premiere of Garth Knox's *Secret Letters*, written for them as a companion piece to Janáček's *Intimate Letters*.