

PERTH EASTER FESTIVAL of CLASSICAL MUSIC

Sat 27 Mar - Fri 9 Apr
filmed live at Perth Concert Hall

Thursday 8 April: 1pm

in co-production with



Maxwell String Quartet

Colin Scobie, *violin*

George Smith, *violin*

Elliott Perks, *viola*

Duncan Strachan, *cello*

Haydn: String Quartet in G minor Op 74 No 3 'Rider'

Beethoven: String Quartet in E flat major Op 74 'Harp'

While Joseph Haydn's quartets are often overshadowed by those of his sometime pupil Beethoven, they are important to appreciate as having essentially broken the ground that allowed the younger composer to extend the genre's expressive parameters.

While Haydn's earlier quartets conformed to the expectations of the social contexts they were intended for during his period of employment in service to the Esterházy, the **String Quartet Op 74 No 3** (known as the 'Rider Quartet') marks an important stage in the development of the string quartet. It is the last of the six string quartets contained within Haydn's Opp 71 and 74, which were dedicated together to Count Anton Georg Apponyi.

The quartet opens with an austere ascending passage in G minor, with the four instruments locked tightly together in octaves. This introductory theme incorporates a series of crushed notes that have a strangely destabilising effect. However, this quickly gives way to a warmer theme in E flat major, with an ascending melody that emerges from a dotted figure. At first, this is accompanied by the triplet figure that then becomes the means for Haydn to propel us into an exploratory development section, culminating in a blistering section that precedes the recapitulation of the opening. The slow movement is in the unusually remote key of E major, though it somehow retains an almost melancholic character. Just before the reprise of the opening theme, Haydn introduces a strange but striking kind of shivering effect, where the entire quartet is required to play a series of quiet, measured demi-semiquavers. The third movement introduces the customary minuet.

However, in a reversal of the contemporary convention, Haydn introduces this in G major — with the ensuing trio in G minor (normally it was minor—major). This ambiguity between the major and minor modes is continued into the fourth and final movement. This is the movement from which the quartet acquired its fame as the 'Rider', with the offbeat syncopations between the first violin and its colleagues in the main theme sounding like a galloping horse. Haydn plays off the tension between this theme and the major-mode semiquaver theme, eventually fusing them together in the coda, as the quartet finally unequivocally resolves into a bright-sounding G major.

Ludwig van Beethoven's **String Quartet in E flat Major Op 74** was written in 1809. The quartet's nickname, the 'Harp Quartet', is a reference to the *Pizzicato* passages (i.e. the material for 'plucked strings') heard repeatedly in the opening movement. The quartet shares its key with two other important works written by Beethoven during the same year, the Piano Sonata *Les Adieux* and the *Fifth Piano Concerto* (the so-called 'Emperor'). This is classic middle-period Beethoven: while his musical thinking is evidently more complex than that displayed in his more youthful works, there remains an intrinsic sense of optimism throughout, with Beethoven's musical forms always designed to answer the questions they pose. This quartet was Beethoven's first return to the genre since the Op 59 quartets of 1806, and it demonstrates a novel sense of artistic ambition across its four movements.

The opening *Allegro* is lively but assured, with the exposition leading into a development section that explores some apparently unlikely tonal regions. With the recapitulation of the main theme, Beethoven tacks on an exhilarating coda that really is one of the most striking passages in the entire quartet repertoire. Supported by the lower strings all playing *Pizzicato*, the first violin is suddenly called upon to spin out an extended series of broken chords, before each of its colleagues eventually takes up the bow again, creating a seemingly orchestral crescendo. The second movement introduces the key of A flat major, the subdominant to E flat major, and ushers in a softer timbre and altogether more introspective soundworld. The first violin becomes the soloist, accompanied by the remaining trio, with a searching melody that is distinctly vocal in character.

The third movement, marked *Presto*, introduces C minor. It bears an audible similarity to the corresponding movement of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, with its insistently repeated two-note figure. However, whereas in the symphony this is used to lead to a musical catharsis, here Beethoven calls on the players to dissipate the momentum they have generated by tapering off to a *Pianissimo* ending ('very soft').

The concluding movement opens with a comparatively relaxed theme, based on a three-note dotted motif. However, in typical Beethovenian style, this is progressively subjected to a rigorous process of transformation, with the composer creating a sequence of increasingly compelling variations climaxing in the ebullient *Allegro*.

David Lee

Biographies

Maxwell String Quartet

1st Prizewinner and Audience Prizewinner at the 9th Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition in 2017, and hailed as “brilliantly fresh, unexpected and exhilarating” by The Herald, and “superb storytelling by four great communicators” by The Strad Magazine, the Maxwell Quartet is now firmly regarded as one of Britain’s finest young string quartets, with a strong connection to their folk music heritage and a commitment to bringing together wide-ranging projects and programmes to expand the string quartet repertoire.

The quartet performs regularly across the UK and abroad, at venues including London’s Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, and St Martin-in-the-Fields, with performances through the Park Lane Young Artist Programme, the Tunnell Trust Awards Scheme, and the Kirckman Concert Society programme.

After their success at Trondheim in 2017, the quartet has toured widely across Europe, including performances in the Tivoli Concert Hall Series, the Amsterdam String Quartet Biennale, Stavanger Festival, Trondheim Chamber Music Festival, Schiermonnikoog and Wonderfeel Festivals in the Netherlands, Lammermuir Festival, and Music at Paxton in Scotland, and more. Its debut tour of the USA in January 2019 garnered critical acclaim from the New York Times “eloquent performers who bring the same sense of charisma and sense of adventure to their programming”, and performing to sold out venues in New York, Florida, California and Washington.

Collaborations have included working with the Danish String Quartet to perform Scottish and Danish folk music, and working on a new commission for clarinet quintet with composer/clarinetist Mark Simpson. The Quartet’s debut CD on Linn Records, featuring string quartets by Haydn alongside the quartet’s own compositions based on Scottish traditional folk music, received glowing reviews from international press.

The Quartet is formed of four close friends, who grew up playing folk and classical music together in youth orchestras and music schools across Scotland. The group officially began in 2010 at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where its founding members met as postgraduate students.

In 2011, the Maxwell Quartet was named as Residency Artists for Enterprise Music Scotland 2011-2013, which saw several acclaimed concert tours over their two-year tenure. Performing widely across Scotland, the quartet established a reputation for delighting audiences with their “unaffected enthusiasm” North Highland Times and their “panache and conviction” Strathearn Herald. The quartet has since held residencies at Oxford University, Perth Concert Hall and many chamber music festivals across the UK, including their own festival Loch Shiel in the west highlands of Scotland, and a new self-curated concert series at Guardswell Farm in Perthshire. The quartet currently holds the position of Associate Artist at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, and at Music at Paxton Festival in the Scottish Borders.

Passionate about collaborating with musicians and other artforms, the quartet has worked with a global roster of artists and institutions including Cryptic Theatre, Wintour’s Leap, Royal Ballet School, Lunir, cinematographer Herman Kolgen and many more. The quartet has also worked with some of the UK’s most dynamic composers including commissions by Anna Meredith, Tom Harrold, Mark Simpson and Colin Broom.

In addition to a busy concert diary, the quartet regularly feature in broadcasts for BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio Scotland, as well as giving schools workshops and concerts for children.

The Maxwell Quartet has studied with the Endellion Quartet through a Chamber Studio mentorship programme at King's Place, and privately with Hatto Beyerle, founding member of the Alban Berg Quartet, in Hanover, Germany. Other mentors have included Miguel da Silva (Quatuor Ysaye), Erich Hobarth (Quatuor Mosaïques), Krzysztof Chorzelski (Belcea Quartet), Donald Grant (Elias) and Alasdair Tait.

The quartet plays on two fine Italian violins, by Castello and Calcanius, generously loaned to them from the Harrison Frank Foundation; a J.B Vuillaume viola, and a Francesco Ruggieri cello, both on loan from generous benefactors.



tickets: www.horsecross.co.uk

