

# ARTISTS for MARCH 8, 2018

## ELIAS STRING QUARTET

Sara Bittloch, violin  
Donald Grant, violin  
Simone van der Giessen,\* viola  
Marie Bittloch, cello

The Elias String Quartet is internationally acclaimed as one of the leading ensembles of their generation. Known for their intense and vibrant performances, the Quartet has travelled the globe collaborating with some of the finest musicians and playing in the world's great halls.

In 2015, they completed their groundbreaking "Beethoven Project," performing and recording the complete string quartets. This was broadcast on BBC 3, and performed in 11 major venues in the UK. The Quartet has also recorded the cycle for the Wigmore Hall Live record label - six albums in total, of which the first was released in January, 2015. The Elias has also taken an all-Beethoven programme to Carnegie Hall and to San Francisco, and has documented their journey on a dedicated website, supported by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust: [www.thebeethovenproject.com](http://www.thebeethovenproject.com).

The Quartet was chosen to participate in BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists' Scheme 2009-11 and is the recipient of a 2010 Borletti-Buitoni Award. They were awarded the 2010 BBC Music Magazine's Newcomer of the Year Award and were nominated in 2013 and 2014 for an RPS Award and in 2014 for an Australian Art Music Award. In 2013 they were awarded a Mentoring Scholarship from the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn. They received 2nd prize and the Sidney Griller Prize at the 9th London String Quartet Competition.

They have performed alongside such artists as Leon Fleisher, Michael Collins, Christian Zacharias, Pascal Moragues, Ralph Kirshbaum, Dame Anne Murray, Joan Rogers, Mark Padmore, Michel Dalberto, Peter Cropper, Malin Broman, Simon Crawford-Philips, Piers Lane, Ettore Causa, Anthony Marwood, Huw Watkins, Roderick Williams, Allan Clayton, Melvyn Tan and the Endellion, Vertavo, Navarra, Heath, Belcea and Jerusalem Quartets.

The Elias are passionate about new music and have premiered pieces by Sally Beamish, Colin Matthews, Matthew Hindson and Timo Andres. They worked with Henri Dutilleux on his string quartet *Ainsi la Nuit*

and recently recorded Huw Watkin's *In My Craft or Sullen Art* with Mark Padmore for the NMC label.

The Quartet is steadily building a recording catalogue that has been met with widespread critical acclaim. Alongside three releases on the Wigmore Live label they have released discs of Mendelssohn and Britten. They have also released a disc of French harp music with harpist Sandrine Chatron for the French label Ambroisie, Goehr's Piano Quintet with Daniel Becker for Meridian Records and most recently Schumann and Dvorak Piano Quintets with Jonathan Biss.

The Quartet take their name from Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah*, of which Elias is the German form. They formed at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester where they worked closely with the late Dr. Christopher Rowland and later became Junior Fellows and Associate Quartet. They also spent a year studying at the Hochschule in Cologne with the Alban Berg Quartet. Other mentors in the Quartet's studies include Peter Cropper, Hugh Maguire, Gyorgy Kurtag, Gabor Takacs-Nagy and Rainer Schmidt. For four years they were resident string quartet at Sheffield's "Music in the Round" as part of Ensemble 360, taking over from the Lindsay Quartet.

**\* The Elias Quartet is grateful to welcome Simone van der Giessen as a temporary member while violist Martin Saving is recovering from an injury which prevents him from participating in the current North American tour.**

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# PROGRAMME for MARCH 8, 2018

Quartettsatz in C minor, D. 703

Franz Schubert  
(1797-1828)

Allegro assai

String Quartet No. 2, *Intimate Letters*

Leoš Janáček  
(1854-1928)

Andante  
Adagio  
Moderato  
Allegro

## INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 12 in E flat major,  
Op. 127

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

Maestoso - Allegro  
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile  
Scherzo. Vivace - Presto  
Finale: Allegro con moto

## *Tuning Your Mind lecture*

WMCT Artistic Director Simon Fryer: *Announcement of 121st season*

WMCT President Diane Martello: *Announcement of the 2018 CDA winner*

Open to all.

12.15 p.m. sharp, Walter Hall, Edward Johnson Building

**The Elias String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists.**

[www.davidroweartists.com](http://www.davidroweartists.com)

[www.eliasstringquartet.com](http://www.eliasstringquartet.com)

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As a courtesy to others, please refrain from wearing perfume or other scents.

Please turn off cell phones and other noise-making devices.

No photography or recordings of any type during the performance.

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Complimentary refreshments will be available at intermission.

Please come and meet the artists on the stage following the concert.

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## NOTES for MARCH 8, 2018

Some years ago the New Yorker published a cartoon that showed a short, stout young man in early 19th century clothes and spectacles coming down a staircase into a space that would be recognizable to any North American, the whole thing titled "Schubert's Unfinished Basement." The joke is only possible because of that composer's well-known Unfinished Symphony. He didn't call it that, of course, and it wasn't performed until well after his death, but the title has stuck and has implications, I think, for the way you listen to that particular piece of music. You know there ought to be more, and however much you have enjoyed a performance you can't help wondering what the completion might have been like. From that point of view it is helpful that when publishers got around to printing the work on today's programme, again long after Schubert's death, they called it simply a quartet movement – *Quartettsatz* – and not the Unfinished Quartet, which in truth it seems to be. With this non-committal title it is much easier to believe, if we want to, that we have a complete, finished work in front of us.

Schubert had grown up in a family in which quartets were played in the home, and in his youth had written a number of such works using the examples of Haydn and Mozart as models. These stop in 1816 and by the time he came to write the *Quartettsatz* in 1820 he was beginning to come to grips with the new and revolutionary directions in which Beethoven had been taking the quartet as a genre. For Robert Winter, this single movement marks Schubert's maturity as a composer of instrumental music and its "furious intensity ... concentration and variety of texture and register paved the way for the three great quartets of Schubert's last years." The philosopher, Roger Scruton, attempting to pin down the meaning of this music, or perhaps simply his own reactions to it, suggests that "it breaks the rules in just the way that feelings break through the habits in which we have imprisoned them. The melodic material is emblematic of a joy and tenderness that refuses to be captured by the grief and apprehension that enclose it ... showing ... how fears and griefs can be overcome."

When you write programme notes, at least the non-technical kind that I write, you are always grateful for the odd insight about a piece of music that comes directly from the composer. In the case of Janáček's second String Quartet, however, I am faced with an embarrassment of riches, and I use the word embarrassment here not just to mean an overabundance of material. The composer subtitled the quartet *Intimate Letters* – originally it was *Love Letters* – and the letters in question actually exist, about 700 of them. They document in great detail a curious eleven-year episode in Janáček's life that saw the composition of some of his most important works. In the summer of 1917, after the sudden success of his opera *Jenufa* the previous year, the 62 year old composer was on holiday in the Czech spa town of Luhacovice when he met and fell in love with Kamila Stösslová, the wife of David Stössel, an antiques dealer. She was 26 at the time. His feelings seem to have been acknowledged but not reciprocated, and perhaps for this very reason the relationship was encouraged by Janáček's

wife in the hope that it would counter the very public affair that he had recently begun with the opera singer Gabriela Horvatova. The affair with Kamila was almost completely limited to correspondence and a very one-sided one at that. For all that the composer fantasizes about the two of them being married and having children together – and reading all this you feel something of a voyeur - nothing at all seems to have happened, and the few existing letters from Kamila to Janáček are matter-of-fact and rather banal. We must take seriously the composer's title for the quartet, but the work should be heard as the projection of an idealized love affair, however real it may have seemed in Janáček's mind.

The first mention of Beethoven's E flat Quartet (Op. 127) is in some 1822 correspondence that the composer had with the Leipzig publisher, Carl Friedrich Peters, who was trying to get his hands on new publishable compositions. Beethoven offered him some old works, but also mentions a quartet that "is not fully finished, because I have other things to do." He was exaggerating a little about the quartet since it was only in the first stage of sketching but he was being honest about the "other things" – they included the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa Solemnis*. In any case Peters balked at Beethoven's price and he blew any chance of further negotiation when he told him that he didn't need any more quartets since he had "excellent, and beautiful works" from Spohr, Romberg and Rode. A few months later Beethoven received a letter from Prince Nikolai Galitzin, a Russian aristocrat and amateur musician who asked for one, two, or three new quartets for which he was prepared to pay "what you judge appropriate." Beethoven in reply, quoted a fee of 50 ducats per quartet and promised the first quartet by the end of February 1823. It was actually two years after that date before it was ready for a first run through.

The first public performance, which took place in Vienna, was not a success. Part of the problem was that two separate performers – the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, and the cellist Joseph Linke - both believed that they were to organize the première. To add to this, the piece was under-rehearsed. "It is true," wrote Schuppanzigh later, "that we performed it too soon, and it did not go as it should have done, but I alone should not be blamed." A second performance under Joseph Böhm was more successful since his group rehearsed the work "under Beethoven's own eyes." "I said under Beethoven's eyes intentionally," said Böhm later, "for the unhappy man was so deaf that he could no longer hear the heavenly sound of his compositions...He crouched in a corner, heard nothing, but watched with strained attention...And yet his eyes followed the bows and therefore he was able to judge the smallest fluctuations in tempo or rhythm and correct them immediately."

*John Mayo*