

Philharmonia

Thursday 21 March, 6pm
Royal Festival Hall

Rebecca Chan – violin
David López Ibáñez – violin
Sylvain Séailles – viola
Richard Birchall – cello

TCHAIKOVSKY String Quartet No. 1 (32 mins)

Moderato e semplice

Andante cantabile

Scherzo. Allegro non tanto e con fuoco – Trio

Finale. Allegro giusto – Allegro vivace

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(1840 – 1893)

String Quartet No. 1 in D major, Op. 11 “The Accordion”

(1871)

(32 mins)

We chose this piece because surprisingly it is not one of the most programmed pieces in the quartet repertoire.

We know very well of Tchaikovsky’s large-scale orchestral works but in this piece, his first chamber work, Tchaikovsky excelled himself and even wrote in his own diary that the piece had moved Tolstoy to tears.

We’d like to invite the listener into the journey this piece will take us on. It begins with a sound that gives it its nickname “The Accordion”. The theme in the first movement is written in a homophonic way across the quartet, and with a very distinctive sense of lilt, having both the sense of movement and constant growth within calmness. Eventually, other faster elements appear to take us into a greater complexity, full of dialogue between the players. In the development section the beginning theme is in the background while other mournful counterpoints take the foreground. Eventually we reach a tumultuous storm that can only be resolved at the point of relaxation in which the theme comes back adorned by the

ornaments in the first violin. The coda of this movement is joyous and celebratory, a true transformation of the stormy material heard in the development into something more hopeful and incredibly bright.

The dream-like second movement is the one that brought Tolstoy to tears. Perhaps it gained this Quartet its fame and reputation, so much so that in 1888, Tchaikovsky would arrange it for cello and string orchestra. The melody is based on a folk melody that he heard a gardener sing while visiting his sister in Ukraine.

The Scherzo is a perfect contrast to the Andante, with a strong sense of folk dance and playfulness, constantly jumping between lightness and darkness.

The last movement is a Rondo-sonata that could almost be likened to one we would expect in a Mozart string quartet, almost neoclassical, but with Tchaikovsky’s unmistakable romantic gaze.

Programme notes by David López Ibáñez
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