



# Farnham Chamber Music Festival



## Tippett Quartet

John Mills – violin

Jeremy Isaac – violin

Lydia Lowndes-Northcott – Viola

Bozidar Vukotic – Cello

Festival Director: Elizabeth Cooney

3 October 2020

[www.tilbach.org.uk](http://www.tilbach.org.uk)

## Programme

We are most grateful to the owners of Bury Court Barn  
for very kindly allowing us to hold our concert here

**Imogen Holst (1907-1984)**

### String Quartet

Imogen Holst, the only child of Gustav, was a British composer, arranger, conductor, teacher, musicologist, and festival administrator. She was particularly known for her educational work at Dartington Hall in the 1940s, and for her 20 years as joint artistic director of the Aldeburgh Festival, where she worked with Benjamin Britten.

This string quartet is a new discovery, to date unpublished, which is being promoted by the Tippett Quartet who will tell you more about it.

**Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)**

### String Quartet

*Allegro moderato; Assez vif; Très lent; Vif et agité*

Ravel wrote his quartet in 1902–3 when he was 27 and still a student in the Paris Conservatoire. It was first performed at the Société Nationale in March 1904. It clearly shows the general influence of Fauré, the *cher maître* to whom it was dedicated, but Ravel was more particularly influenced by Debussy's *Quartet*, written nearly ten years earlier. Although it was in no way revolutionary, Ravel's work proved to be too unorthodox to gain the approval of his elders, and was actually counted against him when he applied for the Prix de Rome. Even Fauré criticized the last movement on the grounds that it was badly balanced. Debussy, on the other hand, was full of praise for his disciple and urged him "not to change a note of your quartet".

Like Debussy, Ravel adopted the cyclic form as established by César Franck, in which each movement takes up a new transformation of a germinal theme. The first movement is in traditional sonata form, but with the shift of emphasis in terms of tonality. On keeping with the modal character of the music, Ravel virtually abandons any progression towards the dominant key of C in favour of the closely-related keys of D minor and A minor. He extends this idea to the subsequent movements as well, and throughout the work it is the note A which has the greatest prominence, acting as a pivot between the major and minor modes.

The second movement is marked *très rythmé* (like the Debussy Quartet) and makes its effect by employing flying pizzicato figures and by a strong rhythmic conflict between 6/8 and 3/4 metres.

In the rhapsodic slow movement the note A pivots one step further: by becoming A sharp and then switching harmonically to B flat it leads to G flat minor, which is then resolved into a rich G flat major for most of the movement. The finale, however, swiftly re-establishes the tonal centre on A, around which Ravel creates another rhythmic mosaic, this time juxtaposing quintuple and triple metres, and sweeps the music back towards F major for its exhilarating conclusion.

*Programme notes provided by Making Music*

----- INTERVAL -----

**To comply with regulations please do not leave your seats except**

- to visit the loos via door in the far right corner, or
- to go outside for some fresh air.

**Please do not go into the gardens behind the barn as this area is private.**



## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

### **Razumovsky Quartet Op 59-1**

*Allegro; Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando  
Adagio molto e mesto – Thème Russe (Allegro)*

The first performance was in February 1807 probably given by Ignaz Schuppanzigh's quartet, perhaps as part of his first ever public chamber music concerts.

This quartet is the first of a set of three commissioned by Count Rasumovsky, Russian ambassador in Vienna from 1792 and one of Beethoven's principal benefactors. Rasumovsky himself was a keen violinist and subsequently maintained his own 'house' quartet in which he played second violin to Schuppanzigh.

We do not know what the Count's reaction to the quartets was, although the players were taken aback. Quite apart from the technical and ensemble difficulty, involving rehearsal, rather than just 'playing through' as amateurs are inclined to do, these are by no means 'house music' for private entertainment. When the violinist Felix Radicati complained that the quartets were not music, Beethoven responded, "*They are not for you but for a later age*".

Beethoven's first set of quartets Op. 18 had been published in 1801 in a musical world where Beethoven still stood largely under the shadow of Haydn and Mozart. However, five years later Beethoven had changed the musical landscape for ever with the *Eroica Symphony* (1803). The *Rasumovsky* quartets, as the *Eroica* had done for the symphony, take the string quartet forward from the classical world into new, expansive and heroic territory.

Both the structure and the musical motifs of the first movement are concise, but the melodies are expansive, with the broad opening melody on the cello soaring up three octaves when taken up by the first violin. When this opening returns it leads straight into an exploration of the initial ideas, full of lyrical and dramatic inventiveness. The opening theme re-emerges for a recapitulation where familiar material is played out in new ways, until it finally rounds off the movement.

The second movement is highly original. The opening springy rhythm with its drumming monotone gives it a shape in lieu of a melody. Its subsequent harmonisation by all four instruments comes as a shout of affirmation. Its restless energy, although sometimes thrown off balance by syncopation, constantly re-emerges against a variety of contrasting themes and textures across all the instruments, till it too has the last word.

The slow movement reaches depths of feeling with a melancholy serenity. It begins simply enough with a wonderfully harmonised melody of romantically wide intervals. As the second major melody first heard on the cello makes its appearance, the accompaniment breaks into shorter note values so that the melodies grow over a shimmering background to create a timeless space out of which the first violin embarks on a cadenza which leads directly to the last movement. This is the tribute to Razumovsky's Russian roots as the main theme is derived from a real Russian melody. Beethoven however turns it from a modal melody in slow tempo into a major key at twice the speed. Although the movement often shows rustic good humour, it still shows Beethoven with serious intentions, near the end branching out into a fugal section. Only after this is the Russian melody allowed its original slow tempo in a reflective farewell before the final ebullient closing flourish.

*Programme notes provided by Janet Upward, January 2019*

## Tippett Quartet

*'The Tippett Quartet's performances are little short of astonishing'* The Times

The Tippett Quartet is one of the UK's leading string quartets who perform at the main concert venues and on BBC Radio 3, including the BBC Proms. They have toured Europe, Canada and Mexico.

Although they perform regularly they have focused more than others on developing an impressive catalogue of recordings on many different labels and these recordings have met with universal critical acclaim. Recently they were awarded Gramophone Record of the Month for their recording of Gorécki Quartets:

*'I cannot recommend this recording highly enough, and have run out of superlatives'* - Gramophone

Innovative projects include a ground-breaking reimagining of Beethoven's Op. 135 with composer/soundscape artist Matthew Herbert for a BBC Radio 3 broadcast. They have also given numerous world and UK premières including works by John Adams, Howard Goodall and Stephen Dodgson.

2016 saw the quartet commission pianist and composer Alissa Firsova to write her 'Tennyson Fantasia'. It was premiered at Kings Place with the actor Finbar Lynch reciting Tennyson's poems and was subsequently performed on BBC Radio 3. They also appeared on the Decca CD release of Damian Montagu's music, in which they accompanied the actor Hugh Bonneville narrating his own poetry. A live première of both poetry and music was premiered at Chichester's Minerva Theatre.

They started a collaboration in 2014 with some of the UK's finest Jazz musicians with the launch of their 'Close To You' project featuring Matt Ford – a tribute to the album that Frank Sinatra made with the Hollywood String Quartet.

In 2013 the Tippett Quartet rediscovered Gustav Holst's Fantasy on British Folk Songs which, with the help of the eminent musicologist Roderick Swanson, they were able to complete and perform as a world première on BBC Radio 3.

### **Future Festival Concerts**

**7-30pm Saturday 10 October 2020**

*Farnham Spire Church, GU9 7QU*

**Elizabeth Cooney, violin & John Mansfield, organ**

**[www.tilbach.org.uk/farnhamfestival](http://www.tilbach.org.uk/farnhamfestival)**

**7-30pm Saturday 17 October 2020**

*Farnham Spire Church, GU9 7QU*

**Illustrated talk by Matthew Taylor on Beethoven  
"The Fifth and Bernstein"**

**7-30pm Friday 27 November 2020**

*Farnham Spire Church, GU9 7QU*

**Nathalia Lomeiko, Yuri Zhislin, Alexander Karpeev  
Beethoven, Brahms & Bruch: Piano trios and violin sonatas**