

Wihan QUARTET 

NI 6221



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Producer: Jaroslav Rybář

Sound Engineers: Ondřej Urban

Design: www.doubletakedesign.co.uk

Photo: Sussie Alburg

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www.wyastone.co.uk www.wihanquartet.com

Wihan QUARTET 



Schubert String Quartets

No 15 in G Major D 887

'Quartettsatz' in C minor D 703



The Wihan Quartet
Leoš Čepický & Jan Schulmeister - violins
Jiří Žigmund - viola • **Aleš Kaspřík** - cello

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

String Quartet No 15 in G Major, D 887

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Allegro molto moderato | 22:17 |
| 2 | Andante un poco mosso | 12:39 |
| 3 | Scherzo. Allegro vivace | 7:01 |
| 4 | Allegro assai | 10:23 |

String Quartet No 12 in C minor, D 703 'Quartettsatz'

- | | | |
|---|---------------|------|
| 5 | Allegro assai | 9:45 |
|---|---------------|------|

Total time: 62:12

They have developed an impressive international career, which includes visits to major festivals in Europe and the Far East. They visit the United States and Japan regularly and have had highly acclaimed tours of Australia and New Zealand. They are frequent visitors to the UK and can often be heard on BBC Radio 3 as well as in concert at Wigmore Hall, Bridgewater Hall, the South Bank and many other venues throughout the country.

The Wihan Quartet has won many International Competitions including The Prague Spring Festival and the Osaka 'Chamber Festa'. In 1991, they won both the First Prize and the Audience Prize in the London International String Quartet Competition.

During 2008 the Quartet completed the first ever cycle of Beethoven Quartets in Prague and also repeated this cycle at Blackheath Halls, London. "Their unanimity of conception was admirably and readily apparent in the opening concert" Musical Opinion. "This was an outstanding recital. The performance of the first of the expansive Razumovsky Quartets, Opus 59 was inspired and gripping from beginning to end." Musical Pointers

Their landmark series of Beethoven concerts in Prague was recorded for release on CD and DVD on the Nimbus Alliance label. The Independent said of the release of the Late Quartets: 'these [performances] are excellent: their fiery interpretations do full justice to Beethoven's final masterpieces.' and International Record Review 'one of the best quartets in the world today'. Full details of the Quartet's available recordings can be found on their website: www.wihanquartet.com

The Wihan are Quartet in Residence at Trinity College of Music, London, and for several years have taught many of the UK's gifted young Quartets at Pro Corda in Suffolk. The Quartet are great supporters of the work of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust, giving inspirational concerts and master classes to young people in many parts of the country.

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Leoš Čepický & Jan Schulmeister - violins
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The Wihan Quartet, formed in 1985, are heirs to the great Czech musical tradition. The Quartet's outstanding reputation for the interpretation of its native Czech heritage and of the many classical, romantic and modern masterpieces of the string quartet repertoire is widely acknowledged.



During his early years Schubert composed several string quartets intended for performance within the family circle. (Schubert's elder brothers Ignaz and Ferdinand played the violins, Schubert himself the viola, and their father the cello.) Looking back on his youthful efforts in the summer of 1824, just a few months after he had completed his *Death and the Maiden* Quartet, Schubert seems to have had scant regard for them. Responding to a letter from Ferdinand, who described his pleasure at rediscovering the pieces, Schubert told him, "As far as your quartet sessions are concerned... it would be better for you to play quartets other than mine, for there is nothing to them, except perhaps that you like them – you who like everything of mine."

Schubert had made a brief return to string quartet writing at the end of 1820, in a manner that showed his ambition to produce a work more intense and dramatic than anything he had attempted in the genre before. But just as his first serious efforts to master the piano sonata some three years earlier had resulted in several aborted projects, so, too, the string quartet of 1820 was destined to remain unfinished. Over the string quartet, as over the piano sonata, loomed the giant figure of Beethoven ("Who can do anything after Beethoven?", Schubert once complained to his friend Josef von Spaun); and perhaps it was unwise of Schubert to have chosen to make his return to the quartet arena with a piece in C minor – the key Beethoven had made so much his own. In terms of its actual material the one portion of the work Schubert did manage to complete – the so-called *Quarttetsatz*, or Quartet Movement – is of the highest quality, though it is possible that he remained dissatisfied with its unorthodox form. At any rate, he abandoned the score after having composed no more than forty bars of a slow movement in A flat major. The Allegro was published for the first time in 1870, more than forty years after Schubert's death, while the fragmentary slow movement did not appear in print until 1897, when it was issued in the first collected edition of the composer's works. The editorial board (it included Brahms) regarded the quartet torso as being comparable in value to that of the *Unfinished* Symphony.

Schubert's Allegro begins in an atmosphere of tension and agitation, with continual tremolos forming a cumulative crescendo that reaches its climax on the 'Neapolitan' chord of D flat. These

opening bars are not heard again until the very end of the piece, where the same chord forms part of the forceful concluding cadence. Meanwhile, the recapitulation has been inaugurated with the reappearance of the warmly expressive second subject – not, however, in the home tonality, but in a comparatively distant key. Only in the closing pages does the music at last make its way homewards, with the return of the work's third theme, now in a gentle C major. That theme is, however, brushed aside in dramatic fashion by the delayed reprise of the opening subject.

In the spring of 1828 Schubert gave a concert consisting entirely of his own music – the only such occasion that took place during his lifetime. Among the works on the programme was the opening Allegro of the G major String Quartet D.887. Not for more than twenty years was the complete quartet heard for the first time, thanks to the famous Hellmesberger Quartet, whose pioneering concert series in the early 1850s did so much to establish Schubert's masterpieces in the string quartet pantheon.

Schubert wrote only two large-scale instrumental works in the key of G major, and both are products of the same year of 1826. But while the Piano Sonata D.894 is among his most serene works, the String Quartet D.887 is one of the most unsettled. Its restlessness manifests itself above all in a constant vacillation between major and minor. The work's opening sets the tone for what is to follow: a quiet G major triad, out of which a full-blooded chord of G minor emerges. So unstable is this beginning that when the same material returns much later on, at the start of the recapitulation, Schubert feels impelled to dissipate its tension by radically altering its nature. The recapitulation, indeed, departs so far from the pattern of the movement's opening section that the one may be heard as a variation on the other. Where the exposition had begun with the sound of G major, the recapitulation starts in G minor; in place of the exposition's *fortissimo* G minor outburst, Schubert now presents a gentle G major pizzicato; and for the jagged, forceful phrase immediately following the work's opening bars, he substitutes an almost exaggeratedly smooth and sweet-toned variant. As for the movement's closing bars, they do more than simply renew the major-minor conflict of its beginning: they encapsulate the essential difference between that beginning

and the start of the recapitulation. While the violins have the sound of major turning to minor, the two lower instruments, overlapping with them, re-enact the reverse sequence as heard in the recapitulation.

As if the preponderance of the minor in the opening movement, were not enough, Schubert casts both middle movements in minor keys. His original choice for the slow movement was B minor; but he eventually opted to reserve that key for the scherzo, and to transpose the already notated opening of the Andante into E minor instead. The simplicity of the expansive cello theme with which the slow movement begins serves to offset an episode of startling vehemence. It is a passage that contains outbursts of almost manic violence involving sonorities whose brutality seems to anticipate the quartet writing of Bartók.

The scherzo is a fleeting piece of Mendelssohnian transparency, with a much slower trio in Ländler style, beginning with another broad cello melody. As for the finale, it renews in striking fashion the conflict between major and minor that had lain at the heart of the opening movement – so much so that the main rondo theme, which lurches continually between the two opposing modes, actually sets out this time in the minor. Not even the intermittent moments of Rossinian delicateness elsewhere can more than momentarily lighten the atmosphere of this restless piece. Following the first contrasting episode the music makes a prolonged excursion into the scherzo's key of B minor – first, for a passage that maintains the 'tripping' rhythm that has prevailed thus far; and then for a more forceful idea given out in chorale-like chords. The centre of the piece is occupied by yet another idea: a shadowy theme in the dark key of C sharp minor, given out by the second violin while the first accompanies with a delicate pattern of repeated notes. At the end, with the final appearance of the first episode's delicate theme, the music seems about to disappear gently into the distance, before two forceful chords bring it to a firm full-stop.

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