Franz Schubert

String Quartets

Quartet in A minor, D.804
Quartet in D minor, D.810
(Der Tod und das Mädchen)

FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET

divine art

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

Quartet in A minor, D.804 (Op.29, February/March 1824)				**38:03**
1	I	*Allegro ma non troppo*	14:23	
2	II	*Andante*	7:51	
3	III	Minuetto:- *Allegretto*	7:12	
4	IV	*Allegro moderato*	8:37	

Quartet in D minor, D.810 (Op.posth, March 1824)				**44:11**
Der Tod und das Mädchen				
5	I	*Allegro*	16:47	
6	II	*Andante con moto*	13:28	
7	III	Scherzo:- *Allegro molto*	3:58	
8	IV	*Presto – Prestissimo*	9:58	

Total playing time: **82:15**

Performed on period instruments with gut strings

THE FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET

Lucy Russell violin

Marcus Barcham Stevens violin

Alan George viola

Sally Pendlebury cello

THE MUSIC

On 31st March 1824 Schubert wrote to his friend, the writer Leopold Kupelwieser, that he had recently completed two string quartets – the A minor and the D minor ("Death and the Maiden") offered here. But the tone of much of the letter is uncomfortably gloomy, often despairing; and he actually quotes two lines of Goethe which he had set ten years earlier in *Gretchen am Spinnrade*: "My peace is gone, my heart is heavy; never, never again will I find rest". Is it a coincidence that the haunting accompaniment figure with which the second violin opens the A minor quartet bears a striking resemblance to that which (at a quicker pace) begins this same song? And the first few bars of its Minuetto must surely be a direct quotation from another song, *Die Gotter Griechenlands*, where the relevant words (by Schiller) are "Fair world, where have you gone?"

However, the familiarity of the *Andante*'s principal theme really is genuine, since it is identical to that in the B flat Entr'acte from his (virtually contemporary) incidental music to *Rosamunde* (so which came first? Our leading Schubert scholar, Brian Newbould, has his theories……). As the late Sir Jack Westrup has pointed out, this quartet – particularly the first three movements – is more song-like in character than almost any other of Schubert's non-vocal works. All their main subjects consist of extended lyrical melodies, and with accompaniments which might easily be transferred to the piano. A song-cycle, almost…… but what songs! Much of the time, particularly in the first and third movements, the music almost foreshadows the atmosphere of *Winterreise* in its bleak evocation of pathos and desolation. Having contracted syphilis two years earlier, he might well have felt his days to be numbered – although such speculation can be treacherous: remember that the aforementioned *Gretchen am Spinnrade* was composed by a lad of seventeen; whereas the gloriously sunny B flat trio appeared right after *Winterreise* itself, when his demise was all too near at hand.

In the letter to Kupelwieser he goes on to declare that he wanted to write a third quartet (the G major was not actually composed until two years later) "and so prepare the way for a *grosse Symphonie*". So if we wonder why works like the D minor and G major quartets strike us as being more symphonic in their gestures than we might have expected, we only have to recall these various statements – allied to the practical fact that the last ten years of his life presented no opportunities at all for the public performance of a new Schubert symphony.

The first six had been composed at a rate of one a year, when there was an orchestra available to him either at school (the Vienna *Stadtkonvikt*) or at Otto Hatwig's music salon. Thereafter he completed just one more symphony (No.9), even though he attempted no fewer than six others (including the famous "Unfinished", as well as the Tenth). No doubt there were many more being spawned in his mind, and it might not be too fanciful to speculate that the final two quartets, the string quintet, two piano trios, last piano sonatas, were really all symphonies that could never expect to find an orchestra to play them! However, the A minor quartet does not really fall into this category: yes, more song-like than symphonic; but also respecting the intimacy of the quartet medium, to an extent that creates an impression of private musing rather than public pronouncement. That is not to say that D.804 is any less ambitious in its scale and scope: dramatic moments it surely proves to contain, all the more startling because of their angry abruptness and severity.

In the end one's overall view of this work is likely to be affected to a considerable degree by how one interprets the finale in one's own mind. To start with, it is far more of a dance than the preceding minuetto – although somewhat of the country type, with the accents on the wrong beat of the bar. It is one of those paradoxical pieces which one often encounters in Schubert's later music: it seems to be jolly, and for the most part it actually *is* jolly….but is it? Prof Newbould declares that "the gaiety of the finale is…. something of an illusion". Much depends on how faithfully the composer's dynamic markings (particularly *pianissimo*) are adhered to in performance. In any case, such

instances as the dusky second subject, with its uneasy dotted rhythm, and the sudden breaking off at the climax of the development section, surely go beyond the straightforward requirements of dramatic contrast for its own sake. Inevitably, in this A minor quartet, everything is coloured by what has gone before. But for the time being, our rustics can trip off, if a little wistfully, away into the distance……..

What more is there to say about its successor – arguably the most famous of all string quartets? Certainly for this writer there has been, over the past few years, the thrill and amazement of new discovery: because the quartet repertoire is of such quality and vastness it follows that no amount of longevity as a player can deny such an eye-opening experience on a fairly regular basis. But in response to the incredulity of listeners, who enquire as to why it took 42 years of quartet playing to take on this of all pieces, the main response has been simply that it was well worth the wait! The Fitzwilliam policy always used to be that audiences can hear this, and other well known pieces (eg Smetana's *From My Life*, Dvořák's *American*), whenever they want to; and our feeling was that we would contribute much more to concert life by promoting music they might not otherwise hear. But there comes a time when one needs to start ticking off these timeless masterpieces, before the opportunity is lost….. And in this instance it has truly been cathartic: this musical icon, that one has known so well all one's life, heard on countless occasions played by other ensembles, coached with students and amateurs like, occasionally read through of course – now eventually performed ourselves, at long last! Truly an experience never to be forgotten.

There were a number of features that surprised – even shocked – us during our first attempt: for example, the ferocity of much of the first movement, the incredible imagination – yet firm discipline – of those so-familiar variations; above all, the wild tempestuousness of the tarantella finale (Prof Newbould prefers "saltarello"), which still leaves us all physically and emotionally shaking at certain moments – notably that scary silence when the spidery music

temporarily pauses for breath from its headlong momentum. These are sounds that can keep you awake at night, yet one can only be aghast to look back to an earlier generation of music commentary, there to be reminded that certain composers – whose greatness we would nowadays hardly question – seemed to be the butt of endless criticism. Schubert (in the good company of such successors as Bruckner and Tchaikovsky) was often found wanting over matters of form and structure: Arthur Hutchings declared the D minor quartet to be "not a perfect work", whose first movement contained "…defects, which are entirely architectural…"; and continuing: "...the finale, however fine a conception in itself, is the very movement which is hardly in keeping with the pathos of its fellows". To his credit, Prof Westrup admired its "ruthless logic…..tautness of construction….an intelligence which is firmly in control"! Contradictory or not….? And it is no surprise to find the most perceptive of all to be Brian Newbould: when you have spent hours, months – years! – grappling with a composer's unfinished manuscripts, making them available to the world through inspired performing editions/completions, you are surely more likely than most others to have got under a composer's skin. Of course Prof Newbould realizes that such remarks as those of Hutchings are founded on mistaken attempts to judge one composer's structures using criteria derived from an earlier era. He also recognizes the sheer scale Schubert was aspiring to, when he suggests that the very opening simulates "trumpets & drums" (and often, over the years, reminding us that tempi for Schubert's first movements must normally be correspondingly more spacious than for, say, Beethoven). Just being content to sound like a string quartet in late Schubert simply will not do! In his classic book on the symphonies we are reminded that "…the appeal of the symphony was so strong that he never lost his commitment to it…."

There is a popular misconception that Schubert never actually heard two of his greatest "symphonic" works: the ninth symphony and this quartet. Whilst it is true that there were no public performances during his lifetime he did actually witness them both rehearsed. One wonders whether he too was as taken aback

by what he had done as we quartet players have been…. The often terrifying power and directness of this piece might well have left him as breathless and exhilarated as the music itself.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

"Death and the Maiden" has to be one of the most universally popular of all chamber works – and its composer perhaps the most loved of musical geniuses. But the A minor quartet – usually known these days as "Rosamunde", after the principal melody of its Andante – is hardly less appealing. The fact that they are both set in minor keys might, however, suggest a predominantly dark and gloomy experience ahead. Yet the extraordinary variety Schubert conjures from the constraints of the quartet medium itself ensures that there is something here for everyone: this music can appeal on so many different levels, from the almost hedonistic pleasure to be gained from the stream of unforgettable melody, to the sheer intellectual mastery of the composition process. Along the way there is drama aplenty, occasional laughter, tears – and joy! It is for the players to ensure that this huge range of expression, emotion, and craftsmanship is conveyed to listeners in its fullest glory.

Our starting point has always been the score itself, ideally in a scholarly edition which ensures we have access to exactly what the composer himself put down. Following on from this, it is no less crucial to remember that musical notation has developed over the centuries, like any other written language – which means we must acknowledge that many symbols did not necessarily mean the same then as they do now. This is especially relevant in matters of articulation and note length: the familiar staccato dot (*Punkte*) may well require its attendant note to be played shorter – but not necessarily so when a succession of such dotted notes are enclosed within a slur: this double symbol implies *portato*, or "bowed vibrato", ie no real separation of notes, simply a continuous bow stroke with dips in sound between them.

Then there is the "dagger" type of staccato (*Striche*) – which has more to do with a sharper articulation at the note's beginning, rather than any reduction in its length. Uniquely relevant to Schubert is his flamboyant writing of the common accent, which for decades was mistakenly printed as a "hairpin" *diminuendo*. It follows that he actually included far more accents than formerly we were used to hearing, requiring judicious interpretation according to their context. There are also a couple of notational matters arising from his close connection with Mozart, and further back into the 18th century: should trills begin on the upper note, or the main note itself; with or without terminations? And, in the context of triplets, should dotted rhythms be played as written, or lined up with the triplets? There are many examples of the latter conundrum, eg the G major Ballet Music from *Rosamunde*, where different conductors take differing views; in these quartets one such instance in the D minor is the repetition of its first movement main subject with attendant triplet fanfares. The corresponding movement of the A minor causes real head-scratching over trills: some are noted with terminations, others not. In all of these instances we've eventually chosen to recognise Schubert as a 19th century composer (but not always consistently so……..).

Next, there is that one aspect of performance which cannot easily be notated (other than the specifying of instrumentation): SOUND! Instruments themselves were undergoing rapid transition at the beginning of the 19th century, brought about by the demands made on them by contemporary players and composers – not least one Ludwig van Beethoven, of course. The increasing size of concert venues also played its part: so instrument makers simply had to keep up! With wind instruments it was mainly a question of "improving" their models (eg by attaching more keys). The violin family proved rather less straightforward: luthiers would have followed similar principles with their brand new instruments; but historical examples from the 16th century onwards needed to be subjected to a process of upgrading, through the enlarging/strengthening of their acoustical machinery (the

soundpost, bass bar, bridge, tailpiece), and even the actual replacing of the original neck with a new one – attached at a sharper angle, to increase string tension; plus supplying heavier, thicker (gut based) strings, as well as increasing the length and weight of the bow. No doubt players in 1824 would have been using a hotchpotch of instruments, new and old – the latter in both original and updated condition – such that we can only guess at what Schubert himself might have been used to hearing. For these advanced, large scale string quartets we decided to use correspondingly more advanced instrumental set-ups: our "upgraded" Italian masterpieces, but strung with Viennese style gut.

Yet the instruments themselves only get us part way towards an appropriate sound and performance style for Schubert and his contemporaries: most of this is dependent on a historically informed use of the bow – particularly with regard to flexibility of speed, bow strokes, and articulation. For the left hand, it is necessary to understand that in 1824 the type of continuous vibrato we are used to today was still unheard of: the device was employed (if it were used at all!) as a decoration, ornament, emphasis of an accent, increasing of intensity or warmth. In other words, as an expressive device – but always with due deference to the "good taste" insisted on in so many tutors.

It is a long accepted fundamental with Schubert's music that his dynamic markings suggest a far wider range than any composer had previously required (always with the inevitable exception of Beethoven, needless to say); it follows therefore that we players need to treat every single marking seriously – even when he seems to be repeating himself: such instances very often occur at special harmonic moments/significant modulations, and so we assume he was expecting a change of sound to heighten the effect. Indeed, we have to be sure to put across all those varied colours and textures, as well as that huge dynamic range, as implied in the scores – right down to a barely audible *pianissimo*: remember that, with the D minor in particular, he was thinking on a truly symphonic scale. To increase our awareness of how a player close to Schubert's time might have performed his quartets, we consulted the edition of no less a

violinist than Ferdinand David, for many years *Konzertmeister* of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, which reveals an enlightening exposition of his own bowings and fingerings – our more frequent use of open strings and harmonics might surprise some, but comes straight from David himself!

Finally, that vexed, age-old dilemma: tempo! With Beethoven we really have little choice: the invention of the metronome (by Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, in 1816) gave him that control over tempi he'd long craved (even though many performers are still reluctant to acknowledge the authenticity or truth of his wishes). Conversely, Schubert virtually never used the system; which suggests that he may have been less fussy, or perhaps had more trust in his performers – but with one important exception: by great good fortune, this happened to be the actual song which gave the D minor quartet its familiar title, *Der Tod und das Mädchen*, where he asks for minim = 54. This means that, not only can we have a fairly accurate idea for the correct tempo of the quartet's second movement, but also for other pieces of its genre. From this it follows that the comparing of specific movement types can usually help us reach a *tempo giusto*; a prime example would be the country dance finale of the A minor quartet, which clearly relates to the F minor "Momen Musical" (*sic*, D.780), or to the finale of the 6th symphony – both also marked *Allegro moderato*: Sir Thomas Beecham's recording of the latter proved particularly inspirational here; hence our own chosen tempo, which might seem steadier than is sometimes heard. Similarly his tarantella finales (eg the G major Quartet, C minor Piano Sonata D.958), where sheer speed is perhaps less of a priority than a certain devilish urgency – even in this manic D minor Presto (until the very end….).

As a (risky?) generalisation then, we might hopefully be forgiven for taking Prof Newbould's well-founded theories on Schubert's first movements to imply that, in comparison with Beethoven, this principle be applied across the board. Moving on to the middle movements: should all variations in D.810 be played at the same tempo? Or scherzo and trio sound at exactly the same speed as each other? Although there will always be disagreement over these issues, the

evidence is that some of his later chamber works (eg the G major Quartet and C major Quintet) do call for substantially slower tempi for their trios. From this it might be deduced that he could have been thinking along those lines already, without necessarily notating as such. Certainly the song-like nature of this section in the D minor quartet is in total contrast to its scherzo's vehemence, suggesting a need for more space to enable the melody to breathe. And although Schubert's variation movements are more traditional in concept than those of Beethoven in his last quartets, there is surely the feeling of a series of character pieces in the *Death and the Maiden* set, each requiring its own subtle gradations of pace and mood.

So, in our 50th anniversary year, we offer these two visionary masterpieces on instrumental set-ups that might have been familiar in 1824, drawing on performing conventions of that time, but always with overriding homage to this extraordinary genius of symphony and song.

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SOME THOUGHTS FROM PROF BRIAN NEWBOULD

What can be added to Alan George's informative and thought-provoking notes? Perhaps, for a start, that these "late quartets" (late, when written in the composer's mid-twenties?) display – or rather, integrate – bursts of the most challenging and technically supreme counterpoint to be found in the chamber music of the late Classical period. It may be too fanciful to suggest it, but we can almost sense Schubert taking stock of the "Rasumovsky" Quartets of Beethoven, written when Schubert was lad of 10, and building upon their symphonic scope and increased demands on players, to forge a spread-out chain of "Rasumovskies" of his own. Both composers are found stretching their compositional technique to realise their enlarged creative vision. Counterpoint is not the stuff of song. Schubert's inevitably draws more from his symphonic background and aspiration in this respect. There were surely many occasions when he found that the music he invented within a song had potential for development of a kind that would have been inappropriate to

the confines and text of that song. He sought opportunity to explore that potential in the purely instrumental genres. The extent to which he intended to carry more than the notes of the original across to the new medium is a matter for the "nose" of each of us.

One of the finest song-to-instrumental transfers occurs in the relatively unfamiliar Fantasy for violin and piano. We do not call that work the "Sei mir gegrüsst" Duo. Such titles do tend to exaggerate the relevance of the song to the entirety of the full-blown instrumental work. Schubert would have spoken of his "D minor Quartet", for there is no firm evidence that the wonderfully stern stuff of the outer movements is infected by the topic of death. Likewise we would not claim that the "Trout Quintet" has any sniff of piscatorial overtones in its four movements flanking the one that is pretty clear in its attachment to its origins. (Schubert added his "Trout" Variations to what is in effect already a complete four-movement quintet.) Nicknames added by generations later than the composer tend to focus on what may be only a tangential feature of the music, as in the case of now familiar "Rosamunde Quartet" for the Quartet in A minor, which simply reflects one thematic resemblance. There is no proof which, by the way, came first – the quartet movement or the "Entracte Music No.2" in *Rosamunde*, which it resembles. It is more likely that Schubert would have amplified a quartet movement by adding woodwind and horns, as Gerald Abraham observed. Given that the first three notes of the same quartet's drooping first theme are exactly those of Verdi's *Requiem* written fifty years later and in the same key, dare one suggest some purely coincidental relevance here, in view of the suicidal resonances of Schubert's letter to Kupelwieser dated 31 March 1824, shortly before the quartet appeared?

Having worked with the Fitzwilliams on another Schubertian project recently, I can vouch for the scholarly thoroughness with which they have approached this recording, not to mention the saturation of Alan George in Schubertian studies. He was the first conductor to find the perfect tempo for the first movement of the "Tenth" Symphony when conducting my realisation of that work, sketched but left unfinished upon Schubert's demise.

50th ANNIVERSARY SEASON

THE FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET

Lucy Russell *violin by Ferdinando Gagliano, 1789, Naples*

Marcus Barcham Stevens *violin by Luigi Piattellini, 1774, Florence*

Alan George *viola attrib Guarneri workshop, 1740/41, Cremona*

Sally Pendlebury *cello by Giovanni Rogeri, c1700, Brescia*

The original members of the FSQ first sat down together at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, in October 1968 – as undergraduates during their inaugural term. Their first concert appearance took place in Churchill College the following March, ahead of their public debut at the Sheffield Arts Festival in June – making the Fitzwilliam now one of the longest established string quartets in the world, and possibly unique in having reached a half-century with an original player still on board! The current line-up combines founding member Alan George with a younger generation of performers: violinists Lucy Russell (herself celebrating 30 years in the group) and Marcus Barcham Stevens, along

with former Vellinger Quartet cellist Sally Pendlebury. International recognition came early for the FSQ, as the first group to record and perform all fifteen Shostakovich string quartets, drawing on the players' personal connection with the composer. The quartet has since appeared regularly across Britain, Europe, North America, the Middle and Far East, and Southern Africa, as well as making many award winning recordings for Decca, Linn, and Divine Art: perhaps the most novel so far has been a jazz-fusion collaboration with German saxophonist/composer Uwe Steinmetz and former Turtle Island Quartet violinist Mads Tolling; a return to more traditional fare then saw Bruckner's String Quintet coupled with his early Quartet – begun while Jonathan Sparey was nearing the end of his 37 years as second violinist but delayed by his retirement, eventually released thanks to generous sponsorship by the Bruckner Society of America and The Bruckner Journal (UK). Also now available are the complete chamber works (so far!) by award winning English composer Liz Johnson – including a new quintet which requires five different clarinets! Finally, a long term ambition to record Beethoven and Schubert on gut strings – following the success of previous discs on historical instruments – is finally fulfilled with the enclosed recordings. Thus does the Fitzwilliam remain one of the few prominent quartets to play on older set-ups, yet simultaneously bringing about the addition of nearly 60 new works to the repertoire. After graduating from Cambridge in 1971 they accepted their first professional appointment, as Quartet in Residence at the University of York, succeeding the celebrated Amadeus. There, the group built a niche for itself in concert venues around Yorkshire and the rest of the United Kingdom, at the same time joining a select company of quartets to have emerged under the guidance of Sidney Griller at the Royal Academy of Music.

It was only a year into that Residency that the much documented association with Dmitri Shostakovich first catapulted the Quartet into the public eye. The composer travelled to York to hear their second performance of his thirteenth quartet, and this musical friendship (the composer's own word!) prospered

through correspondence, and the presentation of his final two quartets, which he wrote in the years immediately following that visit. Sadly, a carefully planned trip to spend a week with the composer in Moscow was necessarily abandoned when he died in August 1975. Benjamin Britten afterwards reported (just before his own death) that Shostakovich had told him the Fitzwilliam were his "preferred performers of my quartets"! Complete cycles were given in a number of major centres, including London, New York, and Montréal. A new recording of the last three quartets was specially released by Linn last October to celebrate "FSQ@50" year – alongside this Schubert disc. Whilst their pre-eminence in the interpretation of Shostakovich has persisted, the authority gained has also been put at the service of diverse other composers, from the early 17th century to the present day. Their involvement in 2013 with celebrating Britten's centenary, and before that the chamber works of Delius and Grainger, are only the more recent manifestations of the players' enthusiasm for using anniversaries to promote less familiar music: following Vaughan Williams in 2008, it would appear that Britain has gradually taken its place alongside Russia and Vienna as a principal area of speciality; while in 2015 they looked further north, to honour the joint 150th birthdays of Glazunov, Sibelius, and Carl Nielsen. Beethoven may well follow in 2020……

Having been Quartet-in-Residence at York for twelve years, at Warwick for three, and at Bucknell (Pennsylvania, USA) from 1978, their university work continues at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge, and now at St Andrews – which incorporates an annual quartet course, alongside their regular coaching weekend at Benslow Music (Hitchin). They have also been granted their own annual chamber music festival in the famous "book town" of Hay-on-Wye. The 2018/19 season began with an exceptionally busy September, which included six performances in just one week: a concentration of events to herald the quartet's 50th anniversary season itself (2018/9) – taking in a concert back in Cambridge on March 2nd, 50 years to the day after that debut performance!

www.fitzwilliamquartet.com

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Recording, editing and mastering: Adrian Hunter
Programme Notes: Alan George (Fitzwilliam String Quartet)
Booklet and packaging design: Stephen Sutton (Divine Art)
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FSQ50 logo designed by Jacob George
Photographs of the Quartet by Peter Searle

This recording was funded by family members and close friends of Bastien and Zerine Gomperts, as a memorial to them both. The eminent professor of Biochemistry and the social worker from Pakistan had been major supporters of the Fitzwilliam since 1992; their unwavering friendship is greatly missed, but continues through his daughters Natasha and Miranda, and their own families.

Music old and new from the FSQ

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