

Total performance time: approximately 60', with no interval

Leonkoro Quartet I

Jonathan Schwarz violin

Amelie Wallner violin

Mayu Konoe viola

Lukas Schwarz cello

Erwin Schulhoff (1894–1942)

Five Pieces for String Quartet (1923) 12'

- i. *Alla valse Viennese. Allegro*
- ii. *Alla serenata. Allegretto con moto*
- iii. *Alla Czeca. Molto allegro*
- iv. *Alla tango. Andante*
- v. *Alla tarantella. Prestissimo con fuoco*

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

String Quartet No.1 In C minor,
Op.51, No.1 (c.1865–73) 34'

- i. *Allegro*
- ii. *Romanze. Poco adagio*
- iii. *Allegretto molto moderato e comodo: un poco più animato*
- iv. *Allegro*

The **Leonkoro Quartet** are Britten Pears Young Artists for 2022–23 and are participants on Chamber Music in Residence at Snape Maltings.

The quartet was founded in Berlin in 2019, and takes its name from the Esperanto word for 'Lionheart'. It has won numerous awards over the last year, including 1st prize at the Quatuor à Bordeaux competition, and multiple prizes at the International String Quartet Competition at Wigmore Hall, including 1st prize and the Britten Pears Young Artists Programme prize. In May they were appointed BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists for 2022–4, and most recently they received the Merito String Quartet Award, which includes support over four years and a composition commission.

The quartet has studied with Heime Müller at the Musikhochschule Lübeck, Günter Pichler (Alban Berg Quartet), and with members of the Artemis Quartet at the Berlin University of the Arts.

This season, the Leonkoro Quartet performs at venues including the Konzerthaus Berlin, the String Quartet Festival in Heidelberg and the Dresden Music Festival, and begins a three-year residency in Leeds.

Schulhoff: Five Pieces for String Quartet

The Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff was – by his own admission – extremely fond of nightclub dancing. He indulged in it for hours at a time and occasionally danced all night. It provided, he said, phenomenal inspiration for his work. He was born in Prague to a German-Jewish family before studying in Vienna, Leipzig and Cologne, absorbing the new American jazz rhythms along the way.

The *Five Pieces* are a product of this colourful heritage – a satirical take on five popular dances, put together in the manner of a Baroque suite. That was their only link with the past – musically, Schulhoff built on the experimental sounds of Schoenberg and his flourishing Second Viennese School, along with a sprinkling of his beloved jazz. The *Five Pieces* had a triumphant premiere in 1924: according to one critic, Schulhoff was a composer ‘with the sense not to take himself too seriously’. The audience, he noted, was duly grateful.

Brahms: String Quartet No.1

The ghost of Beethoven haunted countless later composers, not least the young Brahms. ‘You have no idea,’ he said, ‘how it feels to hear the tramp of such a giant behind you’. He was particularly nervous of tackling a string quartet: Beethoven’s late quartets were rapidly becoming recognized masterworks and he had also to contend with the legacy of Haydn – the so-called ‘father’ of the genre. Over the space of a couple of decades, Brahms destroyed at least 20 early attempts until finally, after dozens of practice runs and at least one secret performance, he published this C minor quartet at the age of 40.

It shares its key with his first symphony, which had an even lengthier gestation, Brahms being convinced that the public would expect nothing less than ‘Beethoven’s tenth’. For a while he worked on both at the same time and the rich, orchestral textures that were one of his hallmarks are evident in the quartet, particularly in the outer movements, which share a kind of angst-ridden intensity. They frame more intimate sections with only a hint of disquiet, but the anxiety returns with a new ferocity in the final allegro, and the quartet reaches an ultimately tragic conclusion.

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