

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) String Quartet No.1 (Kreutzer Sonata) (1923)

Adagio - Con moto

Con moto

Con moto - Vivo - Andante

Con moto - (Adagio) - Più mosso

George Bridgetower was a Polish-African violinist, a friend of Beethoven and the original dedicatee of his tempestuous A major violin sonata '*Sonata per un mulattico lunatico*'. Shortly after the first performance in 1803, Bridgetower insulted a woman-friend of Beethoven, who then changed the sonata's dedication to Rodolphe Kreutzer. Kreutzer didn't much care for Beethoven's music and never played the '*outrageously unintelligible*' sonata. This 'Kreutzer' Sonata inspired a novella (1889) by Leon Tolstoy in which a husband's jealousy is inflamed by his wife playing the sonata with an attentive male violinist. Arriving home unexpectedly one night, the husband finds the pair together in the music room and stabs his wife to death. The violinist escapes (undignified to chase him in one's socks); the distraught, guilt-ridden husband, acquitted of murder, rides the trains seeking the forgiveness of strangers.

In 1907-9 Janáček had been inspired both by Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and by his *Kreutzer Sonata*. Unfortunately, not only his sketches from *Anna Karenina* but also the complete three-movement Piano Trio inspired by the *Kreutzer Sonata* have been lost. Much later in 1923, Janáček returned to the topic of the *Kreutzer Sonata* producing his first string quartet. We have Janáček's word, corroborated by Pavel Dědeček the violinist at the first performance of the lost piano trio, that some of the ideas from the piano trio gave rise to the quartet. The quartet was written in just a fortnight in October 1923 in Janáček's characteristic fragmentary, episodic, mature style; it swings the listener violently across a huge range of emotions. By then the 69-year old Janáček was having a musically productive but one-sidedly passionate and obsessive (730 letters) relationship with Kamila Stösslová, a married woman 38 years his junior. He wrote to her: '*I was imagining a poor woman, tormented and run down, just like the one... Tolstoy describes in his Kreutzer Sonata*'.

The opening contains two elements (*illustrated*): a slow (*Adagio*), anguished, rising and falling motif on the violin and viola, followed immediately by a faster (*Con moto*), busy motif on the cello. These two elements dominate the first movement, taking on a variety of



forms, and recur throughout the work. It is perhaps not too fanciful to see their link with the opening *Presto* of Beethoven's original 'Kreutzer' violin sonata (*also illustrated*).

Tolstoy's jealous husband was particularly wary of its power: '*..how can that first Presto be played in a drawing-room among ladies wearing low-necked dresses? ... [it leads to] an awakening of energy and feeling unsuited both to the time and the place.*'

The second movement, in the remote 6-flats of Eb minor, starts with a speeded version of the earlier falling motif and soon leads us into a frighteningly icy world of *tremolo* played *sul ponticello* – close to the bridge. The ice melts into the 5 sharps of B major with faster relentless triplets. The *Con moto* opening of the third movement (*illustrated*) echoes the second subject of



Beethoven's opening *Presto* (illustrated); its timidity is interrupted by more of Janáček's scary *sul ponticello*. The final movement starts calmly with the rising motif of the work's opening, but the energy rises relentlessly with fast accompanying figures that become a manic gallop to the exhausted end.

Mark-Anthony Turnage (b. 1960) Awake (2021)

Mark-Anthony Turnage was born in Corringham, Essex. At 14 he began studying at The Royal College of Music Junior Department with Oliver Knussen, John Lambert and later Gunther Schuller.

He has written numerous orchestral works including *Three Screaming Popes* (inspired by the series of paintings by Francis Bacon), chamber works, four full length operas (the first 'Greek' bringing him international fame) as well as choral works and pieces for solo voice with a variety of accompaniments.

He also has a keen interest in jazz and has written several pieces featuring jazz musicians.

Awake was commissioned by the Castalian Quartet to mark the 100th anniversary of Janacek's *Kreutzer Sonata*. It was first performed on August 20th 2023 in the Queens Hall, Edinburgh.

Turnage's piece was inspired by an intricate line of connections! Primarily on Rita Dove's collection of poems 'Sonata Mulattica' about the life of the mixed-race 19th century violin virtuoso George Bridgewater. Beethoven, who was so impressed by Bridgewater's playing, originally dedicated his own *Kreutzer Sonata* of 1809 to him, but they fell out and Beethoven changed the dedication to the French violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer.

Janacek's quartet was in turn inspired by Tolstoy's novella of the same name, of which the action is centred round a performance of Beethoven's sonata.

Turnage has said how much he loves both the Beethoven and Janacek pieces, and some aspects of both composers music are perhaps subtly reflected in his piece.

The title of the piece is a play on the words 'awake' and 'a wake'.

It is in two movements, the first named 'Bridgewater', the second 'Shut Out' and lasts around 15 mins.

Béla Bartók (1881-1945) String Quartet No 5 BB110 (1934)

Allegro

Adagio molto

Scherzo: alla bulgarese

Andante

Finale: Allegro vivace

Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge inherited substantial wealth from her Chicago-based wholesale-dealer father. She used it most generously and effectively to encourage the writing and performing of chamber music: auditoriums in Washington and New Haven, the Coolidge medal for services to chamber music and the Tanglewood Festival all sprang from her support, along with directly commissioned new works. Bridge, Britten, Poulenc, Prokofiev, Ravel, Schoenberg, Stravinsky all received commissions, as indeed did Bartók. He had been recommended to her by the Pro Arte Quartet, themselves supported by Coolidge. Bartok's Fifth String Quartet was the result, composed in just one month in 1934 and premiered in the Coolidge Auditorium in April 1935. Bartók had toured the States on a two-month concert tour in the winter of 1928-29, and finally emigrated there with his wife in

1940.

1934 saw the start of a new phase of Bartók's life. Dohnányi's appointment to be head of the Budapest Academy of Music in the summer of 1934 allowed Bartók to realise a long-held ambition to transfer to a position in ethnomusicology in the Academy of Sciences. The post allowed him to devote himself to a 'complete, rigorously critical and exact publication' of Hungarian folk music, in collaboration with Kodály, with whom he had collected about 14,000 items. Release from his everyday music teaching led to a golden period of composition. Four major chamber works were written between 1934-39: the last two string quartets (nos 5 & 6), the Sonata for two pianos and percussion, and Contrasts for clarinet, violin and piano. His folk-music collecting provides rhythmic and melodic material for the fifth quartet. For example, the third movement has one Bulgarian time signature - 9/8 grouped as (4+2+3) - for the *Scherzo*, and another - 10/8 grouped as (3+2+2+3) - for the *Trio*.

The fifth quartet, though chromatic, has a melodic and tonal flavour that comes from Bartók's 'melodic new chromaticism'. With this, as reported by Yehudi Menuhin, Bartók 'wanted to show Schoenberg that one can use all 12 tones and still remain tonal'. By interleaving the notes from two different modes (the whole tone Lydian mode and the Phrygian) he could use all 12 tones but preserve a common base (illustrated).



Bartók was also fascinated by different structural symmetries. At the largest scale the Fifth Quartet is an arch shape, centred around a *Scherzo & Trio*. But within this arch is a wealth of different structures. For instance, the first movement is itself an arch: the different sections of the exposition are played in the recapitulation in reverse order, and also inverted in pitch. The last movement is also arch-like: ABCB'A' plus a final coda. Between these movements are two slow movements in Bartók's 'night-music' style. In addition, the keys of the different sections progress through a whole-tone scale: the exposition is in B-flat, C and D; the development is in E; and the recapitulation is in F-sharp, A-flat and B-flat. The whole tone scale contains the tritone, which is a particularly important interval in this quartet: it divides the octave symmetrically into two equal halves.

Despite all these erudite constructions, the work is a captivating emotional roller-coaster. You never know what is coming next. For example (spoiler alert!), just before the end of the last movement there is a bizarre episode: marked *Allegretto, con indifferenza*. The second violin plays a simple rising tune (illustrated) whose banality is emphasised by the barrel-organ style accompaniment. No one quite knows who is the target of its unexpected irony.



The very definite ending (illustrated) gives a final symmetric twist, with the contrary-motion scales inverting one another.



And all this in just a month!

Programme notes by Guy Richardson (Turnage) and Chris Darwin (Janáček and Bartók)