PROGRAMME NOTE

This work is one of the Elias Quartet's three commissions, each taking as its starting point one of the three Schumann Quartets. I was allocated the first, in A minor.

Schumann arranged the first performance of these quartets for his wife Clara's 23rd birthday, and having a 23 year-old daughter myself, I couldn't help being moved by the thought of this young couple who had fought to be allowed to marry, and the great challenges they were to face in their married life. Clara's distress at Robert's mental illness, her struggle to support the family, and her grief throughout her widowhood, are elements that made their way into my own music.

I was interested in the idea that Schumann finished the A minor Quartet (No. 1) last – after writing the other two, and also that later in life, he was troubled by a persistent high 'A' ringing in his ears.

My quartet consists of 9 very short, fragmentary movements – each tilting a broken mirror towards a particular passage in Schumann's work, and reflecting widely differing moods; from melancholy to elation.

The first of these is a meditation on the strange and haunting chorale near the end of Schumann's last movement. This is followed by a 'musette' – commenting on the bagpipe-like passage that precedes the chorale. The fragments in turn reflect on the Schumann while working backwards through his quartet, arriving at 'Kanon' which is the 8th fragment, and refers to the canonic opening of the Schumann. As a coda, the 9th fragment literally reflects the chorale, by playing it backwards, juxtaposed with a reference on the viola to the Liebeslied.

My 3rd string quartet, *Read Stanzas* was also written for the Elias Quartet, and it was a great pleasure to write for them again – having recently played my own 2-viola quintet, *Epilogue*, with them.

Nine Fragments was commissioned by the Elias Quartet, with funding from Wigmore Hall, the Harvard Musical Association, and Het Concertgebouw. The World Premiere was on the 22nd February 2019 at Wigmore Hall, London, with US premiere on 19th March at Da Camera Chamber Music and Jazz, Houston, and Netherlands premiere at Concertgebouw on 22nd April 2020.

Sally Beamish 2018

1. Choral (chorale)
2. Musette (bagpipe)
3. Unruhig (unsettled)
4. Liebeslied (love song)
5. Ängstlich (frightened)
6. Witz (joke)
7. Klingeln (ringing)
8. Kanon (canon)
9. Spiegel (mirror)

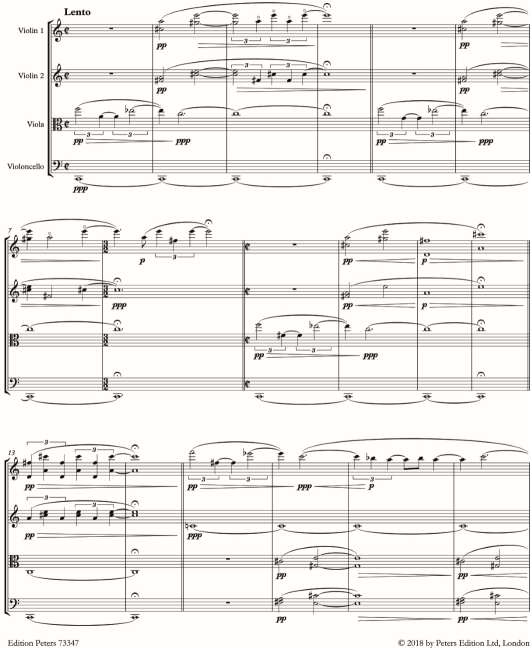
Commissioned by Wigmore Hall, Het Concertgebouw and the Harvard Musical Association

for the Elias Quartet

Nine Fragments

1. Choral

Sally Beamish 2018



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