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King's Hall

Wednesday 14th November 2018

ELIAS QUARTET and NAVARRA QUARTET





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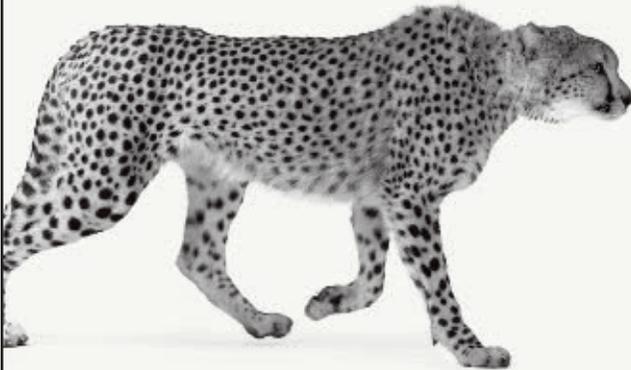
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TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME

Schubert

Quartet no. 13 in A minor, D804 'Rosamunde'
performed by the Navarra Quartet
(Last performance at ICC 27/10/1982)

Sally Beamish

Quartet no. 3 'Reed Stanzas'
performed by the Elias Quartet
(First performance at ICC)

INTERVAL

(Coffee, tea and bar facilities available in the Winter Garden)

Mendelssohn

Octet in E flat major, op 20
performed by both Quartets
(Last performance at ICC 13/05/2009)

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PROGRAMME NOTES

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Quartet no. 13 in A minor, D804
'Rosamunde'

Allegro ma non troppo

Andante

Menuetto: Allegretto – Trio

Allegro moderato

Schubert wrote twelve string quartets between 1811 and 1816 while in his teens; a gap of eight years then elapsed between these early works and 1824, when he resumed composing for the quartet medium. In that year, in an immense flourish of creativity, he produced three great quartets, in A minor (*Rosamunde*), D minor (*Der Tod und das Mädchen*) and G major, together with the Octet, piano duets and the Sonata for Arpeggione and Piano. As with most of Schubert's output, all these works reflect his state of mind during their composition. In the case of the A minor quartet, he was deeply depressed following an extended stay in hospital and aggressive treatment for venereal disease, his psychological state being reflected particularly in the first and third movements. The quartet was written for the famous violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh who ran a string quartet originally founded by Schubert's great hero Beethoven. Schuppanzigh's quartet gave the work its first performance in Vienna in March 1824 to a warm reception; it was the only one of Schubert's chamber compositions to be published in his lifetime.

Schubert's depressed personal circumstances are reflected in the first movement which is reminiscent of his song '*Gretchen am Spinnrade*' with its melancholy text by Goethe. The song's famous 'spinning' motif here supports a sad melody for the first violin and, although the key eventually shifts from A minor to C major, the movement's overall mood is that of grief and despair.

The second movement gives the quartet its nickname *Rosamunde*. In 1823 Schubert wrote the incidental music to an otherwise undistinguished play *Rosamunde, Fürstin von Zypern* by Helmina von Chézy, and he used this gentle pastoral theme from the Act 3 entr'acte not only in the A minor quartet but also, in a varied form, as the foundation of the B flat piano impromptu op 142 (D935). Schubert quotes from another of his own songs *Die Götter Griechenlands* in the rather gloomy *Menuetto*. Both the song, set to a sombre ode by Schiller, and the *Menuetto* mirror Schubert's own prevailing dark mood at this time.

In each of the 1824 quartets two or more movements are deliberately linked in some way to maintain a sense of unity. In the A minor, Schubert uses a motif from the third movement as the most important melodic figure in the fourth, which is in rondo form and brings the work to a rather more optimistic close.

(Duration: approx. 30 minutes)

SALLY BEAMISH (born 1956)

Quartet no. 3 'Reed Stanzas'

Sally Beamish was born in London but has lived in Scotland for the past twenty years and much of her prolific output has been influenced by the music and landscape of that country. Her contribution to Scottish music has been well-recognised and appreciated and a 'Creative Scotland' award from the Scottish Arts Council enabled her to write an oratorio *Knotgrass Elegy* for the 2001 BBC Prom season. Beamish is popular on BBC Radio 3 where she has twice been Composer of the Week and which commissioned *Reed Stanzas*, among other works. The work was first performed in 2011 by the Elias Quartet at Cadogan Hall, as part of the Proms Chamber Music series.

Reed Stanzas was written on the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides, in a windswept landscape of marsh and fen that reminded Beamish of East Anglia and, she says, 'the wind blowing through the reed beds at Snape'

where she spent some time as a violist during the festivals at Aldeburgh. In the work, she draws particularly on the sound quality of the traditional Scottish fiddle, utilising the skill of Duncan Grant, the second violinist in the Elias Quartet, who is also well known as a fiddle player.

Reed Stanzas is written as a series of short impressionistic episodes or variations on a Celtic-inspired theme, beginning with a solo folk-like melody for the second violin that is then taken up by the whole ensemble, setting the tone for the work which is played virtually throughout in the higher registers of the individual instruments. Some distinctive motifs occur throughout the work relating both to folk instruments in which reeds are used, such as the Arabian reed flute, the accordion and the bagpipes, and to birdsong. Beamish tells of a lapwing that constantly flew about her while she was writing *Reed Stanzas* and she charmingly incorporates the lapwing's song into the music.

(Duration: approx. 20 minutes)

INTERVAL

(Coffee, tea and bar facilities available in the Winter Garden)

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

Octet in E flat major, op 20

Allegro moderato ma con fuoco

Andante

Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo

Presto

This masterpiece would be a *tour-de-force* for a composer of any age, but it is made even more astonishing because Mendelssohn was only sixteen when he wrote it as a birthday gift for his friend and violin teacher Eduard Rietz. The Octet, the first universally acknowledged

masterwork of Mendelssohn's artistic maturity, was completed in October 1825. After some revision, it received its first public performance at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in 1836 where it was given a rapturous reception that has continued ever since, causing one critic to say that 'its brilliance and perfection make it one of the miracles of nineteenth-century music'.

The string quartet was a relatively new medium in 1825 and most composers wrote for the classic combination of two violins, one viola and one cello. The German composer Louis Spohr (1784-1859) did indeed write a *Double Quartet* in 1823 (D minor, op 65) using the same combination of strings as Mendelssohn (four violins, two violas, two cellos) but he employed the quartets antiphonally as two quasi-independent groups occasionally combining as one. However, the brilliantly innovative Mendelssohn treated the eight instruments as a single entity, exploring the full range of expressive and textural resources available for this particular combination of instruments and he instructed that the Octet should be 'played by all the instruments in symphonic orchestral style. Pianos and fortes must be strictly observed...' Spohr himself generously recognised the genius of the work, praising it as 'quite another kind of art'.

Inspired by his readings of Shakespeare and Goethe, Mendelssohn introduced a new (and influential) element into nineteenth-century musical language, that of an ethereal world of fairies and benevolent spirits. So far as the Octet is concerned, this light airy magical mood is perfectly captured in the *Scherzo*, a movement to which Mendelssohn himself attached particular importance, arranging it for full orchestra in 1829. He recreated its atmosphere in 1826 in his *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture, based on the Shakespeare play, and he orchestrated the *Scherzo* again as an alternative third movement to his Symphony no. 1 in C minor.

(Duration: approx. 30 minutes)

Programme notes © Ann Keith

ELIAS QUARTET

Sara Bitlloch violin
Donald Grant violin

Simone van der Giessen viola
Marie Bitlloch cello

Both of tonight's highly acclaimed quartets were formed at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester around the turn of the millennium. The **Elias Quartet** was formed in 1998 by French/Catalan cellist Marie Bitlloch and Donald Grant. Magnus Johnston, now violinist with the Navarra, was their first violinist and, in keeping with tradition at the RNCM, the quartet was given his name. Several years later Sara Bitlloch, sister of Marie, replaced Magnus and the quartet changed its name to Elias in honour of Mendelssohn's oratorio Elijah. *'Mendelssohn's op 13 Quartet was one of the first pieces that we played... We're very passionate about Mendelssohn's music, so we wanted the connection with him in our name'*, explains Marie. The then violist, Martin Saving, has recently been replaced by Simone van der Giessen who has moved from the Navarra! (Are you keeping up?)

The Elias quartet was chosen to participate in BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists' Scheme 2009-11 and is the recipient of a 2010 Borletti-Buitoni Award, as well as BBC Music Magazine's Newcomer of the Year Award. These and other prizes led to global travel, collaboration with some of the finest musicians in some of the world's greatest venues and international acclamation for their intense and vibrant performances.

In 2015 the Elias completed a ground-breaking Beethoven Project: performing and recording the complete string quartets of Beethoven. Broadcast by BBC Radio 3 and performed in 11 major venues in the UK, the Quartet have also recorded the cycle for the 'Wigmore Hall Live' record label. All Beethoven programmes in the US followed and they have documented their journey on a dedicated website supported by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust: www.thebeethovenproject.com

The Quartet are steadily building a recording catalogue and have released discs of Mendelssohn and Britten as well as a disc of French harp music with harpist Sandrine Chatron, and most recently, Schumann and Dvorak Piano Quintets with Jonathan Biss.

The Elias are also passionate about new music and have premiered pieces by Sally Beamish, Colin Matthews, Matthew Hindson and Timo Andres. They have worked with Henri Dutilleux on his string quartet 'Ainsi la Nuit' and recently recorded Huw Watkins's 'In My Craft or Sullen Art' with Mark Padmore for the NMC label.

NAVARRA QUARTET

Magnus Johnston *violin*
Marije Johnston *violin*

Sasha Bota *viola*
Brian O’Kane *cello*

Formed at the Royal Northern College of Music in 2002, the **Navarra Quartet** commenced their studies under the guidance of the late Dr Christopher Rowland. Their development continued in Cologne with the Alban Berg Quartet, the Pro-Quartet in Paris, Prussia Cove and at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. The Quartet has built an international reputation as one of the most dynamic and poetic string quartets of today. Selected for representation by the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) from 2006-2010, they have been awarded the MIDEM Classique Young Artist Award, a Borletti-Buitoni Fellowship, a Musica Viva tour and prizes at the Banff, Melbourne and Florence International String Quartet Competitions. Violist Sasha Bota has recently joined the Navarra, replacing Simone van der Giessen, who has moved to the Elias!

The Navarra Quartet has appeared at major venues throughout the world including the Wigmore Hall, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Konzerthaus, Sydney Opera House and at many festivals such as Bath, Grachten, Sandviken, Rheingau, Aix-en-Provence and the BBC Proms. They have given concerts in USA, China, Korea and the Middle East and collaborated with such artists as Guy Johnston, Mark Padmore, Francesco Piemontesi, Allan Clayton, and the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

Highly acclaimed recordings include Haydn’s ‘The Seven Last Words’ for Altara Records and a disc of Pēteris Vasks’ first three String Quartets for Challenge records working closely with the composer himself. The recording was described by critics as ‘stunning’, ‘sensational’ and ‘compelling’.

The Navarra enjoy teaching the next generation in master classes and summer courses. They recently completed a three-year residency as the Associated Ensemble at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

The Quartet plays on a variety of fine instruments which include violins by Hieronymus II Amati and Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume (kindly loaned to Marije by a generous sponsor through the Beares International Violin Society), an unknown, old English viola and a Grancino cello made in Milan in 1698, generously on loan from the Cruft-Grancino Trust which is administered by the Royal Society of Musicians.

(Biographical note compiled by Sarah Warnes)

CLUB NOTES

YOU'RE A WONDERFUL AUDIENCE

I know we all gain immense pleasure from the performances given by the high-quality artists attracted to play for us in the King's Hall. It is wonderful to hear similar thoughts from our guests as well. After last month's concert Gemma Rosefield, the cellist of the Leonore Trio, wrote to us saying, '*It was such a joy to play for such a full hall and to such a warm and enthusiastic audience*'.

TICKET RETURNS AND REFUNDS

Following on from Gemma's sentiments it is particularly important that we continue to fill the King's Hall. We have a great tradition whereby Concert Club members let us know if they cannot attend a concert so that their seats can be made available for re-sale. This provides as full a house as possible and allows guests only able to make a single concert to do so, many of whom are future season ticket holders.

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If your seat has been sold and you would like to claim a refund this can be obtained at the following concert during the interval or at the end of the concert.

CD STALL

The 13th season of our CD Stall, run by Tony Hudson and his band of volunteers, raised £1,149 from just 7 concerts, taking our running total to £12,881. After the first concert this year it now tops £13,000. The secret of this ongoing success remains two-fold: (1) the fantastic response to our appeals for CD donations – 950 'new to us' CDs since the March 2018 concert, and (2) our loyal band of enthusiastic purchasers for whom a visit to the CD Stall is an essential part of their evening.

120 'new to us' CDs will be released per concert throughout this season – with a mixture of all our music categories at each concert. So there should be something new to interest everyone at every concert. Please come and look!

The 3 for 2 offer remains throughout this season and Tony may even add a 'Special Sale' at some point in the season – watch this space!

Chris Skidmore (Chairman of ICC)

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

Schubert: This beautiful quartet is superbly performed by the Takács Quartet on Hyperion CDA 67585 (full price). The coupling is the ‘Death and the Maiden’ Quartet, and the recording quality is superb. Few Quartets have played Schubert as well as the Quartetto Italiano, and they perform the last 4 Quartets on Decca 446 1632 (2 CDs at budget price). The natural sounding recording of Quartet no. 13 was made in January 1976 but has been transferred to CD to a high standard.

Beamish: No commercial recording of the piece exists at this stage, but perhaps the Elias Quartet could oblige at some time in the future?

Mendelssohn: The fine violinist James Ehnes is included in the Seattle Chamber Music Octet in an excellent recording on ONYX 4060 (full price). The coupling is a very good performance of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, with the Philharmonia conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy, and James Ehnes as the soloist. An equally recommendable disc has the Kodály and Auer Quartets from Naxos 8.557270 (medium price). The recording is well balanced, and the interesting coupling is the Max Bruch Octet, one of his last compositions.

Raymond Waud. raynaud@gmail.com

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Brahms Sonata for Cello & Piano in E minor

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