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PIATTI QUARTET and friends **string sextet**



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PROGRAMME

Tchaikovsky

String sextet in D minor,
Souvenir de Florence, op 70

INTERVAL

Brahms

String sextet no. 1 in B flat major, op 18

PROGRAMME NOTES

STRING SEXTETS

The Italian composer Luigi Boccherini in 1776 was possibly the first to write for strings in tonight's combination of two violins, two violas, and two cellos – a combination which can produce a lush and almost orchestral sound. Boccherini, himself an exceptional cellist, took care to allow the cello a more prominent role than the more usual classical one of providing a strong bass line. Subsequent composers have followed his example. Boccherini frequently played the first cello part in performances of his two sets of string sextets, op 63. He sometimes was driven to substitute for absent violinists and he would play the violin part on his cello at the right pitch!

More unusual string sextet arrangements have different violin and viola combinations and may even include a double bass, thus freeing the cellos almost entirely from contributing to the bass line. String sextets are not played as often as other chamber music combinations as evidenced by our own Club. In our previous 76 years only two sextets have been performed, Brahms second sextet, composed four years after no. 1 (performed here in 1985 & 2004) and Richard Strauss' Sextet for Strings composed in 1942 as a prelude to his last opera, *Capriccio* (performed here in 1993).

In the 85 years between Boccherini's sextets and those of Brahms in the 1860s there are a few notable compositions in the genre – those of Ignaz Pleyel (1791), which substitutes a double bass for one of the cellos, Ignacy Dobrzyński (1845), which swaps a viola for the double bass, and of Louis Spohr (1848), in the conventional format, are perhaps the most well-known although little played. Spohr's sextet, although a late work is lyrical and exuberant and surprisingly youthful in spirit. The critic, Wilhelm Altmann considered this sextet one of Spohr's most magnificent works and wrote in his Handbook that it was a work which every friend of chamber music should get to know. Maybe our programme committee will take notice and we shall get to hear it in Ilkley!

After Brahms wrote his two wonderful string sextets, showcasing the full symphonic sound that six string players can produce, composers such as Dvořák, Schoenberg, Tchaikovsky, Reger, Rimsky-Korsakov, Franck, Korngold, and Martinů followed suit.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY
(1840-1893)

String sextet in
D minor, *Souvenir de Florence*, op 70

Allegro con spirito
Adagio cantabile e con moto
Allegretto moderato
Allegro con brio e vivace

Like Brahms, Tchaikovsky was also prone to bouts of self doubt. Commissioned by the Saint Petersburg Chamber Music Society following Tchaikovsky's election as an honorary member in 1886, the Sextet *Souvenir de Florence* caused the composer great difficulty. 'I started working on [the sextet] three days ago and am writing with difficulty', he told his brother. 'I am handicapped by lack of ideas and the new form. One needs six independent but, at the same time, homogenous voices. This is frightfully difficult. Haydn never managed to conquer this problem and never wrote anything but quartets for chamber music.' He told a friend that he feared he was imagining the piece in orchestral terms and then forcing his ideas into the limits of the six intended instruments. Tchaikovsky made little progress with the work for four years until, in the winter of 1890 whilst in Florence working on his opera *The Queen of Spades*, he jotted down a melody spun out over a pizzicato accompaniment which would become the sextet's slow movement. This theme is the 'souvenir of Florence'; nothing else in the piece was written in or particularly evokes Italy.

Doubts pursued Tchaikovsky right up to the private premiere of the work at the Society. 'I will not publish it at this time', he told Society's chairman, 'not until you and your companions learn it, and correct everything in it that is unidiomatic, not good, ill-sounding ... Only then, after hearing your performance and taking into consideration all your corrections and advice, will I revise the sextet and submit it to the engraver.' The public premiere was given in the autumn of 1892, less than a year before the composer's death.

Despite its troubled birth and its minor key, the sextet is bright and ebullient. Whilst folk melodies abound, the structure and counterpoint are neo-classical and throughout Tchaikovsky acknowledges the symphonic writing of his beloved Mozart, especially in the string textures of the first movement which opens

with a striking minor 9th chord. In the second slow movement, the first violin evokes a balmy summer night before being joined by the cello. A central section is like a whispering evening breeze, an effect achieved by all the instruments playing *a punta d'arco* (at the point of the bow). The moderate pace of the third movement speeds up as the repeated notes drive the music forward in a way reminiscent of the *Trepak* from the Nutcracker Suite. The Russian folk atmosphere of the last movement is emphasised by the drone-like accompaniment until the arrival of the fugue (perhaps included to impress the largely academic membership of the Chamber Music Society) pushes the work to a thrilling conclusion.

Following the triumphant public premiere, all doubts were dispelled. 'It's frightening to see', Tchaikovsky wrote to a friend 'how very pleased I am with myself.'

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 40 minutes

INTERVAL

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

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833-1897)

String sextet no. 1
in B flat major, op 18
Allegro ma non troppo
Andante, ma moderato
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso

Johannes Brahms struggled for years to emerge from what he perceived as the all-encompassing shadow of the mighty Beethoven. Audiences and critics alike considered that it was the younger composer's destiny to carry on the great man's work. One way in

which the young Brahms sought to avoid direct comparison with his predecessor was by choosing to compose in genres which Beethoven had never visited. He composed large scale orchestral serenades rather than symphonies (he was 44 when his First Symphony was premiered) and string sextets, a form Beethoven had never explored. Even so, Brahms's lack of confidence was palpable; 'I have been quite a long time over it and I do not suppose that this will have raised your expectations... but with God's help, nothing is impossible' he wrote to his friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim who would be the dedicatee of Brahms' violin concerto.

A cello is prominent in the radiant opening bars of the first movement, but soon sharply contrasting melodies are passed between the players as cross rhythms abound with five themes. The slow second movement consists of a minor key theme introduced by the viola followed by six variations. Here Brahms revels in the Hungarian rhythms to which he had been introduced by Joachim. There follows a brisk, rustic scherzo before the finale recalls another of the composer's predecessors, Franz Schubert. It is perhaps a sign of the composer's growing confidence that he avoids the familiar high drama one might expect in a finale, preferring instead Viennese elegance.

The success of the premiere led by Joachim in Hanover in October 1860 certainly raised Brahms's spirits. 'It was even more beautiful than I had anticipated, and my expectations were already high', wrote his great friend, Clara Schumann, without exaggeration.

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 39 minutes

(c) E. A. Keith and C. N. Lane

PIATTI QUARTET AND FRIENDS

Judging by the account printed in the Northern Echo, 'This youthful quartet treated us to one of the most spirited and engaging performances I have experienced, bringing wonderful joie de vivre to the music' - we are in for a treat this evening as we greet the **Piatti Quartet** and friends, **Rachel Roberts** and **Jonathan Aasgaard** to our opening concert of the 2023/24 season. The distinguished Piatti Quartet are widely renowned for their 'profound music making' (The Strad) and their 'lyrical warmth' (BBC Music Magazine) and are Resident Quartet at Kings Place in London. A busy concert schedule has taken the quartet all over the UK and also to performances in Australia, Spain, Austria and France. They have appeared several times live on BBC Radio 3 both in concert and for the programme 'In Tune', on Dutch radio and on Australia's ABC network. The quartet's name is dedicated to Alfredo Piatti, a 19th Century virtuoso cellist who was a professor at the Royal Academy of Music, where the founders of the quartet studied, and was also a major exponent of chamber music and contemporary music of his time. Since their inception they have always had projects in the recording studio with critically acclaimed releases through Linn, Somm, Champs Hill, Hyperion, Delphian, Nimbus and NMC record labels.

Michael Trainor, *violin*, is a founding member of the Piatti Quartet and his contributions to chamber music have been recognised when he became an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2018. He is currently first violin (he has played both violin roles a lot over the years) of the Piattis and his distinctive style in this seat can be heard for the majority of their recordings including award winning and critically acclaimed discs. Michael appeared as guest leader of the RTE Concert Orchestra when he was only 21 and has gone on to become a familiar figure as soloist and chamber musician in the UK and Ireland.

Emily Holland, *violin*, and the most recent member of the Piattis, having joined them in 2023, studied at the Royal Northern College of Music where she obtained a 1st Class Honours undergraduate degree and a postgraduate degree in performance. After this she went on to study in Geneva Conservatoire with Gabor Takacs, founder of the Takacs Quartet, with the Benyounes Quartet, for an MA in Chamber Music. She is an active teacher, currently at Bedford School. Tonight Emily is replaced by **Michael Jones**

Miguel Sobrinho, *viola*, is praised for his 'full sonority, tasteful musicality and virtuosity' in the Portuguese press *Publico* and is a scholarship student of Hélène Clément at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM). At RAM he won several prestigious prizes including the Regency award in 2019/2020 for his distinguished studentship throughout his Bachelor's degree and also, in Portugal, 1st prize in several national competitions such as Vasco Barbosa Competition at both Junior and Superior levels.

Jesse Ann Richardson, *cello*, is also a founding member of the Piatti Quartet and studied at the Purcell School then the Royal Academy of Music where she won the Herbert Walenn Prize for cello and graduated with the highest honours. She was chosen by the Park Lane Group for their prestigious Young Artist Series and made her London Purcell Room Debut in January 2011. Jessie is looking forward to recitals on the Countess of Munster Recital Scheme and currently plays a Celonius cello made in 1741 around Turin, lent to her by a patron of the Beares International Violin Society.

We welcome **Rachel Roberts**, *viola*, back to the stage in Ilkley after her recent, remarkable performance earlier in February this year, with Gemma Rosefield, cello. This proved to be an evening to remember when both players provided an almost impromptu concert brought about by the last minute indisposition of their colleague who had become afflicted by a recurrent injury and was therefore unable to play. According to our esteemed reviewer the evening was 'A triumphant rescue!'

Rachel is one of Europe's leading violists and performs internationally as a soloist and chamber musician. She is violist of award-winning chamber music group Ensemble 360, with whom she gives frequent performances at Sheffield's Crucible Playhouse as well as other venues across South Yorkshire. She has also featured as violist with celebrated ensembles such as the Tetzlaff String Quartet, Wigmore Soloists and Nash Ensemble, these latter two involving regular appearances at London's Wigmore Hall. Prizes for her chamber music recordings include twice being awarded the coveted Diapason d'Or, BBC Chamber Choice in BBC Music Magazine, and CD of the month in Fonoforum magazine, Germany. Rachel is also a member of Trio Meister Raro alongside pianist Tim Horton and clarinetist Robert Plane performing a selection of acknowledged masterpieces and fascinating curiosities, with a particular focus on themes of storytelling and fantasy.

Norwegian *cellist* **Jonathan Aasgaard** is one of UK's most versatile cellists, as soloist, chamber musician, studio musician, orchestral principal, teacher and explorer of new music. He was appointed Principal Cello of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 1999 and has since performed more than 40 works for cello and orchestra with the RLPO. He is regularly invited as a guest principal with several leading British and European orchestras and is principal cello of the John Wilson Orchestra. A dedicated teacher, Aasgaard is Professor of Cello at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

Chamber music performances have taken him around Europe, the Middle East, Japan, South Korea and the USA including a range of festivals collaborating with artists such as violinists Nigel Kennedy, Henning Kraggerud and Julian Rachlin, violist Laurance Power, cellists Yo Yo Ma and Giovanni Sollima, pianists Simon Trpceski, Boris Giltberg, Joanna Mac Gregor and clarinetist Martin Frost. He is a member of the exciting UK based Pixels Ensemble with whom he performed in Ilkley in 2019 and the Ulster based chamber group the Fewes.

CLUB NOTES

Welcome

A warm welcome to all members and friends to the first concert of our 77th season. Following the pandemic we have not yet returned to being fully subscribed, so if you know of anyone who wishes to join please let them know and we will accommodate them.

Returned Seats

Although we have a few more seats available to sell at each concert please continue to let us know if you can not attend as members returned seats enable us extend the opportunity to enjoy our wonderful artists to as wide an audience as possible and give the artists that 'Full House' experience.

Thanks

At the start of this season we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Tony Hudson, who has decided it is time to step down from the committee. Tony's contribution to the success of the club over the last 30 plus years is not underestimated, whether it was establishing the CD stall, creating the first website and concert database or providing wise counsel to us all. The other change this year is that Sarah Warnes has stepped down as our programme secretary and passed the Artists Biography baton onto Paul Hurst. Sarah brought a wonderful personal touch to the notes which we know the readers really appreciated and for a number of years edited all of our programmes.

Brochure Cover Quiz

Our members should have received a September newsletter and we hope you liked the opportunity to try and identify the images on the cover of this years brochure. Here are the answers:

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Pyotr Tchaikovsky | 2. Elizabeth Maconchy | 3. Sally Beamish |
| 4. Fryderyk Chopin | 5. Madeleine Dring | 6. Johannes Brahms |
| 7. Franz Liszt | 8. Anton Reicha | 9. Gustav Holst |
| 10. Samuel Barber | 11. Frank Bridge | 12. Margarete Schweikert |

Chris Skidmore, Chair

NEXT CONCERT

WEDNESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2023

Concert 7:30pm

KITTY WHATELY mezzosoprano

JOSEPH MIDDLETON piano



A programme of romantic lieder and English song mostly from the early-twentieth century, exploring in particular those women composers whose works have largely been unjustly neglected in favour of their male contemporaries.

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Members

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Ilkley Concert Club

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The logo for 'Making Music' features the words 'Making Music' in a serif font, with a stylized arch above the word 'Making'. Below the text is the tagline 'SUPPORTING AND CHAMPIONING VOLUNTARY MUSIC' in a smaller, sans-serif font.

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