

Ilkley Concert Club



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HÉLÈNE CLÉMENT viola
ALASDAIR BEATSON piano



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PROGRAMME

Bridge

Cello Sonata in D minor H125
(arranged for viola)

Britten

Elegy for solo viola

Bridge/Britten

There is a willow grows aslant a brook

Bridge

Three pieces for piano solo

INTERVAL

Bridge

Allegro appassionato in B minor for viola and piano H82

Rebecca Clarke

Sonata for viola and piano

Britten

Lachrymae

PROGRAMME NOTES

Frank Bridge, Benjamin Britten and the viola

The viola has been a popular instrument among composers since the baroque and classical periods. Mozart was particularly fond of the instrument. His string quintets (such as the G minor K516) are often called ‘viola’ quintets as he invariably used two violas to augment the string quartet. Since then, and never reaching the popular heights of the violin and cello, the viola, as a solo instrument, has continued to attract composers up to the present day, many of whom, including Frank Bridge (1879-1941) and Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) were not only fine players but left the viola a distinguished repertoire of high quality music. Tonight’s programme provides a rare opportunity to hear exactly how Bridge and Britten intended their music to sound, as Hélène Clément, plays the actual instrument owned by both composers.

Bridge was already a well-established composer when he first met Britten in 1926. Recognising the boy’s prodigious talent, he began teaching him in 1928. Britten described Bridge as ‘a superb viola player’ and his lessons as ‘immensely serious and professional study’. Bridge expected the highest standards from his young pupil, for which Britten was always grateful, writing the Variations on a theme of Frank Bridge in 1937, as a graceful tribute to his master. They remained close friends until Bridge’s death in 1941.

FRANK BRIDGE
(1879-1941)

Cello Sonata in D minor H125
arr. for viola and piano by Hélène Clément

Allegro ben moderato

Adagio ma non troppo

Molto allegro e agitato

Bridge took four years (1913-1917) to finish his Cello Sonata although he completed the richly romantic first movement before war broke out. He found the long second movement very difficult to write, such was his despair at the futility of war, and it certainly conveys a much more troubled feeling than the first. It comprises several sections including a slow movement (*Adagio*) and a scherzo (*Molto allegro*) and a brief modal interlude with an extended coda that refers to the opening of the first movement. The work transcribes particularly well for the viola and piano.

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 23 minutes

BENJAMIN BRITTEN
(1913-1976)

Elegy for solo viola

Although it was not publicly performed until the 1984 Aldeburgh Festival, the autobiographical *Elegy* was written the day after Britten left school aged sixteen, one of the three works for viola that he wrote at this time. He was unhappy at school and this chromatically brooding work, which he wrote to play privately, expresses his feelings at the time.

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 8 minutes

FRANK BRIDGE **There is a willow grows aslant a brook H173**
(1879-1941) **arr. for viola and piano by Benjamin Britten**

Andante

Menuetto. Allegretto

Allegretto

The title is the first line of Gertrude's speech from *Hamlet* Act 4 scene 7 in which she describes the death of Ophelia by drowning. In 1926 Bridge wrote this reflective impression of the tragic event for small orchestra and it was described by one critic as 'a loveliness mingled with unease'. Certainly his music, in this later period, developed a harmonic stringency indicative of the influences of the Second Viennese School.

That Britten was a superlative arranger was established as early as 1932 with this sensitive reduction of Bridge's work, in which he gives the orchestral violin line to the viola. The original scoring has an elusive and mysterious atmosphere which Britten succeeds in incorporating into the arrangement, showing that, at the age of only eighteen, he was already completely at ease with both the viola and the piano.

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 10 minutes

FRANK BRIDGE
(1879-1941)

Three pieces for piano solo

Columbine

Pensée fugitive

Scherzettino

While not chiefly known as a keyboard composer, Bridge composed several volumes of music for piano solo as well as larger-scale chamber works such as the Phantasie Piano Trio (1907). The pieces we hear tonight are charming representatives of his early compositions for piano, ideally suited for the domestic as well as the professional market. *Columbine*, the

first of a set of three pieces H108, was written in 1912 while *Pensée fugitive* and *Scherzettino* (dubbed Bridge's answer to Mendelssohn) date from 1901-1902. They may have been student pieces, perhaps written to give practice in various techniques and styles; *Pensée fugitive*, for example, is a lovely study in thirds and sixths.

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 9 minutes

INTERVAL

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

FRANK BRIDGE
(1879-1941)

Allegro appassionato in B minor
for viola and piano H82

Written in 1907-1908 (when he was chiefly known as a violist rather than composer) the *Allegro appassionato* is markedly different from the other works by Bridge in tonight's programme, being very short, concise and dramatically exuberant. It is written in an ABA structure and well illustrates Bridge's increasing interest in enharmonic and chromatic sequencing (also noticeable in *Columbine*). It was published with *Pensiero*, also for viola and piano but, by contrast, wistful and elegiac in tone.

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 3 minutes

REBECCA CLARKE
(1886-1979)

Sonata for viola and piano
Andante arioso (E flat major)
Andante (F major)
Adagio (D minor)

Although now little known, Rebecca Clarke was among our most eminent post-Great War composers. She studied at both the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College, was a friend of Ravel and Vaughan Williams and an internationally renowned chamber musician and viola virtuoso. She was among the first female professional orchestral players in Britain.

Clarke spent much of her time in America where, in 1919, the press reported a notable new work – her Viola Sonata which had tied with that of Ernest Bloch for first prize at the influential Berkshire Festival Chamber Music competition, winning Clarke fame and prestige. Unfortunately her heyday was short, well illustrated by successive editions of Grove's Dictionary. In 1927 her entry was extensive and included the Viola Sonata

but by 1980 she is completely subsumed under her husband's entry. She had to wait until the 2001 edition to receive again the credit she deserves.

The Sonata is headed by a quotation from Alfred de Musset and is in three movements. The first and third movements maintain a clear thematic link and are in the nature of fantasies, inspired by modality and folksong and showing the influences of Debussy and Ravel. The second movement is a brilliant finely-worked scherzo in compound time.

Last performance at ICC 05/01/2011

Duration: approx. 23 minutes

BENJAMIN BRITTEN
(1913-1976)

Lachrymae
Reflections on a Song
by John Dowland op 48

Lachrymae (1950) comprises a series of ten short variations for viola and piano on the song *If my complaints could passion move* by John Dowland (1563-1626), one of the great English composers of lute songs. Britten took his title directly from Dowland who, in 1604, wrote a set of *Lacrimae or Seaven Teares* as a collection of pavans, galliards and almands for five-part string consort. The wistful sadness that pervades both works reflects Dowland's own pun on his name, *semper Dowland, semper dolens* (always Dowland, always sorrowful) and the overriding impression of Dowland is that of melancholy.

Britten wrote *Lachrymae* for the distinguished violist William Primrose with whom he gave the first performance at the 1950 Aldeburgh Festival. In this work Britten is concerned not so much with Dowland's melodic line but with his subtle use of harmony. The Lento introduction quotes Dowland's song directly in the bass line of the piano and this is followed by a sequence of variations or 'reflections', with the song – complete with Dowland's harmonies – re-appearing in the final variation. In the sixth variation, Britten quotes from Dowland's song *Flow my tears*.

In 1976, despite being seriously ill, Britten kept a long-standing promise to his friend Cecil Aronowitz, the principal violist of the English Chamber Orchestra, and arranged *Lachrymae* for viola and string orchestra. This, too, is among the twentieth century's outstanding compositions for viola.

Last performance at ICC 15/03/2017

Duration: approx. 14 minutes

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HÉLÈNE CLÉMENT viola

ALASDAIR BEATSON piano

We extend a warm and hearty welcome back to Ilkley to H el ene Cl ement who has played here before with both the Benyounes and the Doric String Quartets but we also welcome, for the first time, her accompanist for this recital, the outstanding Scottish pianist, Alasdair Beatson.

H el ene Cl ement is French by birth and moved to London in 2013 where, apparently, she has learned to combine her proud love for French wine with the delicacies of English cheese! H el ene is originally from Clermont-Ferrand where she started taking lessons before joining a conservatory close to Paris, then the Conservatoire National Sup erieur. She took lessons with Hariolf Schlichtig in Munich, followed by study with Tabea Zimmermann in Berlin, for two years. During this time H el ene performed a lot of chamber music in France, Germany and America, and also played as an extra violist in various orchestras, such as the Gewandhaus.

She has a strong thirst and ferocious enthusiasm for chamber music and the viola repertoire and constantly seeks to expand her musical horizons by performing with a wide range of collaborations across Europe and the world. As a chamber musician H el ene has performed at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Wigmore Hall in London, Carnegie Hall in New York, the Kimmel Centre in Philadelphia, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Konzerthaus in Berlin, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg and the Cit e de la Musique in Paris. Her chamber music partners have included Mitsuko Uchida, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Benjamin Grosvenor, Alexander Melnikov and Peter Wispelwey as well as the Bretano String Quartet and the Nash Ensemble. H el ene is a frequent guest at the prestigious Marlboro Music Festival in America and Prussia Cove in England.

Having joined the Doric Quartet in 2013 H el ene has engaged in fulfilling her appetite for deep explorations of the repertoire from Haydn string quartets to newly commissioned pieces performing in venues across the world and recording exclusively for Chandos Records: their most recent releases include works by Haydn, Britten, Mozart and Mendelssohn. Furthermore, H el ene plays Principal Viola in the Aurora Orchestra based in London which is known for its exciting projects such as playing symphonies from memory.

H el ene teaches the viola and chamber music at the Royal Academy of Music, London. Mentoring and coaching young talents is taking a growing place in her life and she is, with her string quartet, the Artistic Director of the Mendelssohn on Mull Festival, a position that sees her play a key role

in providing young professionals in the field of chamber music with a week of intensive mentoring, coaching and development. She has played an 1843 Italian viola owned previously by Benjamin Britten and Frank Bridge, generously lent to her by Britten Pears Arts which led her to the exploration of the music in tonight's recital.

Scottish pianist **Alasdair Beatson** works prolifically as soloist and chamber musician, adept on modern and historical instruments, and renowned as both performer and pedagogue. Notable performances in 2024 include multiple appearances at Wigmore Hall, in concert with Steven Isserlis, Viktoria Mullova and Alexi Kenney, as member of the Nash Ensemble, and in festivals including Bath Mozartfest, Ernen, Lewes, Megaron Spring Festival, Peasmarsh, Resonances, West Cork and Yellowbarn.

Alasdair is an acclaimed, sincere musician. Alongside a particular affinity with the classical repertoire and the music of Schumann and Fauré, he often explores the more exotic: Catoire, Pierné, Thuille; Debussy's *Jeux* (in the composer's arrangement for solo piano); Ligeti Horn Trio, Harrison Birtwistle's *Harrison's Clocks*; and Thomas Adès' *Piano Quintet*. His concerto repertoire includes works of Bach, Bartok, Fauré, Hans Abrahamsen, Hindemith, Mozart, Sally Beamish, Stravinsky, and Messiaen. In recent years he has appeared with Britten Sinfonia, Moscow Virtuosi, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Ensemble, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Sønderjyllands Symphony Orchestra and Vaasa City Orchestra.

Recent recordings include Schubert works for violin and fortepiano with Viktoria Mullova on Signum, and a solo piano recital *Aus Wien* on Pentatone. These join an acclaimed discography of numerous solo and chamber recordings, on modern and historical pianos, on BIS, Chandos, Claves, Champs Hill, Evil Penguin, Onyx, Pentatone and SOMM labels. He too is a regular participant at the open chamber music festival at Prussia Cove and has enjoyed working closely with composers George Benjamin, Harrison Birtwistle, Tom Coult, Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Thomas Larcher, and Heinz Holliger.

Alasdair was a student of John Blakely at the Royal College of Music, London, and Menahem Pressler at Indiana University. He teaches solo piano at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and regularly mentors for the London-based Chamber Studio. From 2012 to 2018 Alasdair was founder and artistic director of *Musique à Marsac*, and since 2018 has been the artistic director of the chamber music festival at *Musikdorf Ernen* in Switzerland.

CLUB NOTES

HELP MUSICIANS COLLECTION—HELP REQUESTED

Ilkley Concert Club has for many years proudly supported Help Musicians UK, the leading UK charity providing support for needy professional musicians in their early career, whilst working and in retirement. Over recent years we have raised thousands of pounds for this great cause with a collection at the last concert of each season, with last seasons collection raising over £2,000. It is entirely appropriate that after enjoying a season of wonderful music-making we should help such a worthy cause.

The organisation and co-ordination of the collection is not onerous, however we do need someone willing to volunteer to take this on. It is a once a year task that requires a bit of preparation in April, activity around the concert day in May and then arranging the counting and dispatch of the proceeds the following day. It is an important and useful job but only requires commitment at this particular time.

Please consider if you could help the Concert Club by becoming the ‘Help Musicians collection coordinator’. We already have a number of volunteers who help with the actual collection on the night, so if you don’t feel you can take on the responsibility of coordination you could join their number.

For more information please contact Robert Templar by email at rdtemplar@btinternet.com or call 07720409611.

CD STALL

Our CD stall has a great range of music. All the CDs are donated, and we have been fortunate this year in being given many CDs of very high quality. Should you have any to donate, please contact Julian Roberts on jfratm2002@yahoo.co.uk, or just bring them along to a concert evening.

Julian and Alison say *‘We continue to be very grateful for the enthusiasm of those who purchase CDs. It makes running the stall a real pleasure. Keep up your good work, and look out for targeted promotions over the final concerts of the year...’*

Chris Skidmore, Chair

NEXT CONCERT

WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL 2024

Concert 7:30pm

MAXWELL QUARTET string quartet



Haydn

String quartet in E flat
op 20 no. 1

Haydn

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op 20 no. 5

Beethoven

String quartet in C sharp minor
op 131

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