

THE LENTHALL CONCERTS
SEASON 2007-2008

The Royal College of Music
String Band

directed by Mark Messenger

Wednesday, January 9th, 2008

THE LENTHALL CONCERTS: COMING NEXT

Wednesday, February 6th 2008
7.30pm

Cappa String Quartet



Programme to include:

String Quartet Grieg

A young quartet, formed in 2004 by four students at the Royal Academy of Music and selected for their Young Artists' Scheme by the Tillett Trust

WITNEY WINTER CONCERTS

Friday, January 11th 7.30pm

Wood Green School, Witney

Young-Choon Park (piano)

Haydn Sonata in B minor Hob.XV1:32
Liszt Venezia e Napoli
Scarlatti Sonatas
Chopin Scherzo in B flat minor op.31
Beethoven Sonata in C minor op.13
"Pathétique"

Beethoven Sonata in A flat major op.110
International classical pianist Young-Choon Park studied music at the Julliard School in New York and since then has received exceptional critical acclaim for recital and concert performances the world over.

Tickets £9/£7.50 (Children/WOC students £1)
from Music Stand, High Street;
C Greenway (Antiques), Corn Street; or at the door
Lenthall Members receive a further concession of £1.00.

Programme

Programme notes by Mark Messenger

Chacony in G minor

Henry Purcell
(1659-1695)

The form of the Chaconne is relatively simple, a series of variations usually (but not always) on a ground bass. The use of the ground bass (or repeated bass line) became particularly popular amongst English composers, and the most celebrated of these was Henry Purcell. He used this form many times, both in his operas, and in the instrumental fantasias. Though the terms Chaconne and Passacaglia were at times interchangeable, this work is undoubtedly the former as it retains much of the dance idiom. Using the ground bass does tend to limit the harmonic possibilities of the work, but the genesis for the variations is in fact the bass line itself rather than the melodic lines Purcell chooses to weave over the top. This is a simply technique that is still commonly used in jazz and popular music to this day.



Purcell

Elegy for strings, op.58.

Edward Elgar
(1857-1934)

Elgar's Elegy for strings, a brief single movement work lasting no more than four and a half minutes, was composed in 1909 while the composer was living in Hereford and already working on his Violin Concerto. The commission arose from a comment by a member of the Worshipful Company of Musicians to Alfred Littleton of Novello while the pair were leaving the grave-side of the Company's late Junior Warden, Robert Hadden, that it was a pity that the Musicians' Company had no dirge that could be played on such occasions. Littleton passed on the comment to Elgar who duly obliged, sending it to the publisher on 24th June with the comment that it was not very original but was "well meant", adding in a subsequent letter that it had "no pretension to be anything but quiet, somewhat sad and soothing".

It is marked *Adagio* and its grave, richly scored character suggests something of a restrained lament; indeed, although in retrospect one can appreciate that Elgar, a composer who always responded in personal terms to outside stimuli, may well have felt less than personally involved as he seems to have had no direct involvement with Hadden. However it is worth reminding ourselves that Elgar's great friend August Jaeger ('Nimrod' of the Enigma Variations) had died only a few weeks earlier and it would be surprising indeed if that did not in some way pervade the music.

The memorial service for Hadden at which the music was first performed was held at the Mansion House in London in July 1909, and was used by the Musicians' Company on a number of subsequent occasions. As a final note, there is a certain poignancy in the fact that the Elegy was one of the two last recordings ever conducted by Elgar himself – on 29th August 1933.

THE LENTHALL CONCERTS

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Thanks also to Burford School and Community College for the continued use of the venue.

Oxford Coffee Concerts

Sundays at 11.15am

13 January

Thomas Carroll (cello)

Anthony Hewitt (piano)

Beethoven Cello Sonata no.3 in A op.69
Bridge Cello Sonata

20 January

Jennifer Pike (violin)

Jeremy Pike (piano)

Franck Violin Sonata
Ravel Violin Sonata

27 January

Tippett String Quartet

Beethoven String Quartet op.131
Tippett String Quartet no.1

Tickets £9 adults £8 full-time students,
senior citizens and under-16s, from
Oxford Playhouse Box Office (01865 305305)
or 07976 740024; or at the door from 09.45

Serenade in E minor, op.20

Edward Elgar

Allegro piacevole
Andante (Larghetto)
Allegretto

The second work recorded at that last session in 1933 was this, the Serenade for Strings, music of a very different character. It can safely be regarded as a youthful work for, while it was written in 1892 when Elgar was already 35, it seems likely that it derived from Three Pieces for String Orchestra, written four years earlier but never published and now lost. In the interim, Elgar had married and he and his wife had settled in Malvern after an abortive attempt to establish himself in London. Although he had as yet achieved nothing more than a largely local reputation, the return to the county to which he was so attached and his more settled domestic life seemed to stimulate the creative urge.

The Serenade is in three movements, and is an undeniably attractive piece. Certainly, Elgar himself retained an affection for it, saying to a friend “I like them – the first thing I ever did” – further evidence that the work is based upon earlier pieces. It was first offered to the publishing house of Novello who, astonishing as it may seem to us now, declined and it was left to the German firm of Breitkopf und Härtel to undertake the publication, though not without a financial contribution from the composer himself.

There is an endearing freshness about much of the writing, and it may not be too imaginative to say that it reflects in no small part his pleasure (to put it no more strongly) at having settled in the Malverns. Elgar’s biographer Michael Kennedy has commented upon Alice Elgar’s emotional response to the earlier Three Pieces, and the Serenade itself elicits much the same reaction from listeners today.

The opening movement can well be interpreted as the composer’s reaction to the open air environment of the Malverns, even walking on the hills to those of an imaginative disposition, and the contrasting second subject with its more reflective mood does nothing to dispel this pervading sense of the open air, as those who have experienced early morning or the onset of sunset from the top of the Malvern Hills can testify. There is a distinctly elegiac quality about the central Larghetto, but in the final *Allegretto* Elgar revisits the music of the opening movement, recalling not just the music itself but the mood and the place in which the Serenade was created.



Elgar

Concerto in G minor for two cellos and strings RV 531

Antonio Vivaldi
(1678-1741)

Jonathan Bloxham and Christina Clunies-Ross - cellos

Allegro
Largo
Allegro

“The genre is problematic by its very nature. A double concerto is like a drama that has two heroes instead of one; by laying common claim to our sympathy and admiration, they simply get in each other’s way. But if there is a single musical form that one can legitimately claim rests on the might of a single victorious hero, it is the concerto. Do we not have something similar in painting? Artists avoid double portraits and prefer not to immortalize man and wife on a single canvas.” Thus said the Viennese critic, Eduard Hanslick.

However, he was undoubtedly speaking from a 19th century perspective where the single hero ruled indomitable in the large concert hall. For Vivaldi, this was a more natural medium for a variety of reasons. The double concerto itself can be seen as an extension of the concerto grosso, and even the trio sonata, both common forms in the baroque era. Additionally, whilst holding his position as musical director at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà in Venice (a girls orphanage run by the church), he was required to produce material to best demonstrate the excellent prowess of the musicians under his care. Finally, in this period, instrumental music often mirrored its vocal counterpart where two principal protagonists were common.

The early G minor concerto for two cellos demonstrates a variety of techniques for writing for two solo instruments. There are passages where the voices spar, essentially playing the same material sequentially. The slow movement is more vocal in its conception where both cellos play the melodic line in a beautiful duet of thirds and sixths. There is also the use of tune and accompaniment where the primary material is taken by one player, whilst the other plays harmonic figures such as arpeggios or scales.

Interval

‘Souvenir de Florence’ in D minor, op.70.

Peter Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

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

By 1886 Tchaikovsky was at the height of his powers, having by then composed a number of operas (including Yevgeny Onegin), the first of his major ballet scores (Swan Lake), four symphonies, all three string quartets and a host of other orchestral and instrumental works and songs, and in that year he was awarded honorary membership of the St Petersburg Chamber Music Society. As a token of his gratitude he promised to write a piece of chamber music and dedicate it to the Society, although it was several months later before he began even the

sketches for what was to be a sextet for two violins, two violas and two 'cellos, a combination that he had not previously attempted. It is now commonly played by string orchestra with conflated strings and with double basses largely constructed from the 'cello lines.

Tchaikovsky's progress seems to have been both halting and intermittent, and thus it was June 1890, after Tchaikovsky had returned from three months in Florence (where he had worked intensively on his new opera *The Queen of Spades*) and Rome, before he set to work in earnest. It is clear from his letters that he quickly experienced difficulties, not because he was devoid of ideas but because of the form itself and the need to create six independent yet homogeneous voices, but he persevered, completing the draft by the end of the month and the full score during July. Clearly still unsure about some of the technical detail (especially, one suspects, the balance) following, in his words, this first attempt to break free from the string quartet, he declined to publish it until he had heard it played, and a private performance took place towards the end of 1890. The composer was deeply disappointed and decided to radically revise it, altering substantial parts of the third and last movements, and that final version was published in June 1892, with the first performance taking place in St Petersburg in November of that year.

The title clearly recalls what Tchaikovsky rightly regarded as a musically productive period in the ancient Italian city, but there is no programme attached to the Sextet and there is little if anything of Italy in the actual writing, notwithstanding the generally genial atmosphere of the piece. The *Souvenir* uses the classical four movement mould, with the first cast in sonata form and the two final ones more reminiscent of the composer's native Russia than of sun-drenched Italy. Tchaikovsky's own instructions were that the first movement needed to be played with fire and passion, and the opening of it is turbulent enough, although the second subject does introduce a gentler note. The slow movement (an *Adagio cantabile* in D major) is placed second and has a central section in which the sound is reduced to a mere whisper - *pppp* was Tchaikovsky's original marking, one that he himself described as "improbable". For the Scherzo (marked *Allegretto moderato*), the central core of which was rewritten during the revisions, Tchaikovsky uses the key of A minor, contrasting the rapid central trio with the rather more leisurely outer sections. For the finale he reverts to the home key of D minor; it is the most overtly Russian in character of all four movements, and incorporates an ambitious six-part fugue with the violins entering in unison followed by the violas and then the lower strings, and the work as a whole driving to its conclusion in a final fortissimo passage culminating in three firm chords, not so much a full stop as an exclamation mark!



Tchaikovsky in 1893

The Royal College of Music String Band

Violin 1

Shira Epstein
Adelia Myslov
Ine Pollenus
Hun-Ouk Park
Aiko Kojima
Florian Rago
Marc Charles Montesinos
Tomomi Iwasaki

Violin 2

Jeanine Thorpe
Mate Racz
Douglas Harrison
Felicity Matthews
Irene Hontecillas
Shih-Yun Shao
Jessica Tortorice

Viola

Marina Moore (Tchaikovsky and Vivaldi)
Jordan Bergmans
Julian Chan
Laura Ryan
Cassie Mansi (Tchaikovsky and Vivaldi)

Cello

Yuki Ito
Alice Picaud
Corentin Chassard
Jonathan Bloxham (solo in Vivaldi)
Christina Clunies-Ross (solo in Vivaldi)
Christopher Ferrer

Double Bass

Laurence Ungless
Sebastian Pennar

Mark Messenger

Mark is Head of Strings at the Royal College of Music, and is well known to Lenthall audiences as a member of the Bochmann Quartet. At the age of sixteen he was awarded a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Music under David Martin and Sidney Griller. Two years later he was appointed violin professor at Goldsmith's College in London, and at the age of nineteen made his Wigmore Hall debut. He has since played as soloist and chamber musician in all of London's major concert halls and throughout the world. 1990 saw the launch of his immediately popular jazz/rock group, Mercury Jazz. For four years he was director of Chamber Music at the Aberystwyth International Summer Music Festival and was influential in the development of educational policies for orchestras through his work with the English Symphony Orchestra. For eight years he was a member of the Bingham String Quartet which championed the cause of contemporary music through its adventurous commissioning and performance programme. Currently in addition to his work with the Bochmann Quartet, he is Head of Strings at the Royal College of Music

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