

THE LENTHALL CONCERTS
SEASON 2007-2008

The Cappa Quartet

Wednesday, February 6th, 2008

Quartet no.6 in F minor op.80

Allegro vivace assai
Allegro assai
Adagio
Finale - Allegro molto

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

Mendelssohn's first string quartet was written when he was 14; tonight's was his last, completed a few months before his death in November 1847, a mere 24 years later. It is generally thought to portray his reaction to the death of his beloved sister Fanny the previous May, not to say his thoughts on his own mortality. Not only grief, but exhaustion may have influenced his mood: it was only a matter of months since he had returned from England, where he had overseen six performances of the revised version of *Elijah* in as little as two weeks, in London, Manchester and Birmingham. This, and his continuing duties at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, must have taken its toll, but in the summer of that year he managed not only to draft this quartet but to work on two major works: his third oratorio, *Christus*, and an opera, *Die Lorelei*, both unfinished at his untimely death.

But there is nothing gloomy about the quartet. Certainly not about the opening, which seems to reflect Mendelssohn's life, rather than his impending death: urgent, full of energy and drama. The mood is only partially softened in the second movement, in which it is almost as if the traditional *scherzo* has turned into something much darker. Only in the *adagio*, with its long-breathed melodic structure, does the mood become more introspective, wistful. In the finale Mendelssohn is back in the stormy mood of the first movement, with all four players going hammer and tongs at the end. Raging against the dying of the light, if you like; certainly not a submissive exit.

Interval

Three Divertimenti



Britten with Frank and Ethel Bridge, ca 1930

Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

March
Waltz
Burlesque

In 1933, when still a student at the Royal College of Music, Britten wrote three movements intended for a suite for quartet, to be called "Go play, boy, play!" (a quotation from *The Winter's Tale*, in one of Leontes' suspicious rants). They were to be a series of portraits of school friends,

and the movements originally bore the titles *PT*, *At the Party*, and *Ragging*, but three years later Britten revised them, mercifully changed their titles and relaunched them as Three Divertimenti.

Britten's compositional style was not always appreciated by his tutors at the RCM, and he later said of his alma mater "I don't feel I learned very much". He was more influenced by Frank Bridge, who in turn leaned towards what was happening in Europe at the time, but Britten's own musical voice was already largely formed, as these three charming, quirky pieces demonstrate.

Quartet in A minor op.51 no.2

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Quasi menuetto, moderato
Allegro non assai

Unlike Mendelssohn, Brahms put his first string quartet, written when he was 20, away, and for the next twenty years destroyed anything he wrote in this form, in spite of pleas from musicians like Joachim and his publisher Simrock. It is estimated that he discarded twenty quartets. When at last he finished the two quartets of op.51 he was still not satisfied, and when he heard the Becker Quartet play them he withdrew them and took them with him on his summer holiday in 1873 to give them a final polish.

The A minor quartet was written explicitly for the violinist Joseph Joachim. He was a renowned soloist, and founded the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. He was also a great champion of chamber music, and initiated recitals completely devoted to string quartets, a previously unknown practice. He was particularly partial to canons, in which the same melodic line is passed on to each instrument in turn, and Brahms indulged him to a considerable extent in this work, although sometimes the canons are hard to spot. A further point of interest for us musical anoraks is the inclusion of two cryptograms: the succession of the notes FAE (standing for Joachim's motto Frei aber einsam - Free but alone) and FAF (for Brahms motto Frei aber froh - Free but happy), but without a score in front of one these are hard to spot amid the almost orchestral richness of the first movement. The andante has a gentle forward motion, punctuated by some cautionary assertions, and the minuet has a surprisingly lively trio section. The finale has more than a touch of Hungarian flavour to it, possibly a tribute to Joachim's mother-country. It is tuneful, positive and uplifting.



Brahms

The Cappa Quartet

David Coucheron & Anthony Sabberton, violins
Adam Newman, viola & Brian O'Kane, cello

The Cappa Quartet, founded in 2004, consists of graduates from the Royal Academy of Music and the Juilliard School and is quickly emerging as a quartet of outstanding promise. It already enjoys a busy performing schedule appearing in the Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Paganini Festivals in London, the Norfolk & Norwich Festival, the North Norfolk Festival and have given recitals at Colston Hall - Bristol, Queen Elisabeth Hall, Fairfield Hall and the Wigmore Hall, London. They have been awarded many prizes from the Academy including the Sir John Barbirolli Prize, the Delius Prize, the Sir Edward Cooper Prize and the London Chamber Music Society Award. In January 2007 they were selected for the Tillett Trust Young Artists'

Platform scheme and in March the same year they won the ensemble prize at the Royal Over-Seas League competition.

The Cappa Quartet's rapid development has benefited enormously from extensive coaching from members of the former Amadeus and Brandis quartets as well as the Chillingirian, Vanbrugh, Maggini, Skampa and Takacs quartets. In April 2007, they participated in the International Musicians Seminar at Prussia Cove where they studied with Gabor Takacs-Nagy.

With a keen interest in exploring the contemporary



and English string quartet idiom, the Cappa Quartet tries to combine fresh and unknown works with the more conventional, classical repertoire. Highlights during the past year have included their Wigmore Hall debut, collaborations with violist Hartmut Rohde, pianist Amandine Savary and the Sorrell Quartet. Future engagements include concerts in Norway and Japan, a residency in Aldeburgh, appearances at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the Wigmore Hall and concerts in St. Peter's Church, Eton Square, London where they are quartet in residence.

The Cappa Quartet, who take their name from the famous seventeenth century Italian violin-maker Gioffredo Cappa, currently play on a variety of fine Italian instruments. On loan from anonymous foundations and sponsors are the 1725 "Da Vinci" Stradivari violin and an 1850 Rocca violin. A Ceruti viola c.1800 and a 1906 Degani cello are kindly on loan from the Royal Academy of Music.

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