

Beethoven to Boulez

Sat 15 September 2018 ~ 7.30pm

Haydn

String Quartet in D minor, Op. 42

Andante ed innocentemente

Menuetto: Allegro

Adagio e cantabile

Finale: Presto

Clark, Volle, Gibson, Lewis

Boulez

12 Notations for piano

1 Fantasque – Modéré | 2 Très vif | 3 Assez lent

4 Rhythmique | 5 Doux et improvisé | 6 Rapide

7 Hiératique | 8 Modéré jusqu'à très vif | 9 Lointain – Calme

10 Mécanique et très sec | 11 Scintillant | 12 Lent – Puissant et âpre

Webern

Three Little Pieces for cello and piano, Op. 11

Brendel, Horton

Beethoven

Cello Sonata No. 5, Op. 102/2

Allegro con brio

Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto

Allegro – Allegro fugato

Brendel, Horton

~

Schubert

String Quintet in C major

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Scherzo. Presto

Allegretto

Volle, Clark, Roberts, Brendel, Lewis

Programme Notes

Haydn's Op. 42 Quartet was written in 1784. According to a letter from Haydn to his publisher Artaria it was part of a commission from a Spanish patron to produce some short quartets. Only this one was completed, however, and it is unclear who the patron was or why the commission was not fulfilled in its entirety. The simplicity and brevity of the piece might also suggest that it was written with students or amateurs in mind. Despite its dimensions, it is as sophisticated, emotionally and structurally, as any he wrote. It contains four fully worked movements and Haydn's use of D minor produces music of extreme poignancy.

Boulez's *Notations* date from 1945 when he was still studying in Paris with Messiaen. Although they were not published until much later they contained enough musical possibilities for him to return to them as sources for later pieces. No's 5 and 9 were adapted in his *Improvisation sur Mallarmé 1*, the second part of *Pli selon Pli*, and in the 1970s, following a commission from Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Boulez returned to them again, expanding the first four into orchestral pieces, with No. 7 following twenty years later. Each of the twelve is a tiny sketch in the form of a character piece. By turns they are contemplative, violent, skittish and expressionistic, and they all concern themselves with manipulations of a twelve-note tone row. There is almost no suggestion of Schoenberg here though. If any influence is to be gleaned then it is Webern and Messiaen (especially in the final piece) who are most obvious. The "French" sound-world of Debussy and Ravel can be detected too, however, in particular in the florid and colourful No's. 5 and 11.

The Three Pieces Op. 11 (1914) are the epitome of **Webern's** pared down, freely atonal style. The expressive markings show the hypersensitivity of his expressionistic style. He

was quoted as saying that once the twelve notes had been used, there was no need for a piece to continue. With this music, however, the silence between the notes contains as much meaning as the notes themselves.

Beethoven's final Sonata for Piano and Cello is the only one the five to contain a true slow movement. Together with the last movement of his Op. 101 Piano Sonata it also introduces Fugue as a significant element, one of the forms that would define his 'late' style. The scale of the piece is similar to its sister work with ideas introduced and developed over a short timespan. The explosive piano opening is contrasted immediately by the cello's more lyrical nature. Although this tussle of extremes permeates the first movement, it is ultimately triumphant. Contrast is at the heart of the slow movement too, although here the desolation and tragic D minor of the outer sections is set against the calm and almost religious central section. The transition into the final Fugue is extraordinary – harmonically obscure and otherworldly, giving away nothing of the atmosphere of the last movement. The fugue is the first of the uncompromising fugues of the late style, continued in the last movement of the Hammerklavier Sonata and the *Missa Solemnis* and culminating in the *Grosse Fuge* Op. 133, a piece that Stravinsky described as the first piece of "contemporary" music. In terms of its disregard for the comfort of its performers and the comprehension of the audience the same could be said for this last movement, although, as with the first movement, the feeling at the end is one of triumph.

by Tim Horton

Franz Schubert String Quintet in C D956

Composed in 1828, two months before his death, **Schubert's** only string quintet was also his final piece of chamber music. Given its status now as one of the supreme masterpieces, it is hard to believe that the first public performance

was not given until more than twenty years after Schubert's death - in a concert at the small hall of the Musikverein in Vienna on 17 November 1850, played by the Hellmesberger Quartet with Josef Stransky as the second cellist. The score was not published until 1853. It quickly found admirers, among whom Brahms was one of the most ardent (curiously, Joseph Joachim was less sure when he first heard it, but his quartet went on to give more than a dozen performances in the years that followed). The first movement sets the scene for what is to follow. This is music of truly epic proportions that is anything but overblown – what lodges in the memory is its extraordinary tenderness and supreme lyricism. The slow movement is expansive – almost timeless – written in the remote key of E major: music that is transcendent and ethereal in the outer sections and wracked with turmoil at its heart (with hints of that unrest still lurking in the reprise of the opening material). The Scherzo has a raw, rampaging energy, making the most of open strings and galloping rhythms, but the contrasting Trio section suggests some sort of otherworldly march. The finale is a kind of Gypsy Rondo, with an obvious influence from Hungarian music, and it ends with one of the most startling gestures in the entire Viennese Classical repertoire – a grinding, dissonant D flat resolving into C.

by Nigel Simeone



HISTORY

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Musicians visit Plush from around the world to perform solo and ensemble works, with the platform given to both new formations and established groups. Programmes span a diverse repertoire; from Bach cantatas and Beethoven quartets to lesser known classical and Romantic works and modern discoveries. Contemporary composers such as Oliver Knussen, Harrison Birtwistle and Thomas Adès feature, alongside jazz, improvisation, folk and song recitals.

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