



St Mary's Church, Cratfield
Sunday 13 August 2017

ARONOWITZ ENSEMBLE

Magnus Johnston *violin*
Tom Hankey *viola*
Sebastien van der Kuijk *cello*
Tom Poster *piano*

Concerts at Cratfield

TODAY'S CONCERT

Our concert today explores masterworks of the piano quartet repertoire. The piano quartet format of violin, viola, cello and piano, is less often used by composers than either the piano trio, for violin, cello and piano or the piano quintet, for two violins, viola, cello and piano formats. Whilst performances of piano trios tend to be piano led, with violin and cello accompanying and performances of piano quintets that include a full string quartet can more than hold their own with a piano, a piano quartet falls somewhere between the two and balancing the piano and strings can be problematical. The consequence being that many major composers shy away from this particular chamber music format. For example Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) was a great admirer of Brahms and adored his piano quartet No.1 in G minor Op.25 with its famous *presto rondo alla Zingarese* (Gypsy) finale but was frustrated, feeling that he was unable to hear all the instruments in performance. So he made an orchestral version in 1937 which is absolutely brilliantly orchestrated whilst remaining true to the original. Some wags had it nicknamed, Brahms Symphony No.5 (Brahms, of course having composed only four symphonies). But despite the balancing of instruments issue, major works by great composers have been written for this combination. Mozart kicked off with two great piano quartets, No.1 in G minor K478, and No.2 in E flat major K493. Beethoven wrote three piano quartets (WoO36) as a very young man but never returned to the format in his mature years.

Schubert, whose one essay in the format we hear today, also never returned to it. Mendelssohn, Dvorak, Schumann, Saint-Saens and Strauss, all wrote at least one piano quartet and even Mahler wrote his only piece of chamber music in a single movement piano quartet format. Faure who wrote two piano quartets and Brahms who wrote three, both form the high point of this particular chamber music genre.

TODAY'S PERFORMERS

The individual names of today's performers are well known to Cratfield, having performed here in past seasons, but the group as the 'Aronowitz Ensemble' is appearing at Cratfield for the first time. Besides the four musicians playing for us today, the full Ensemble includes three other musicians: a highly adaptable combination of a string sextet with a piano. They are named after the famous viola player and teacher, Cecil Aronowitz (1916-1978). Since their debut in 2004 they have performed all over the UK and abroad covering a vast range of repertoire; familiar, neglected and new. They joined the BBC New Generation Artists in 2006 and have featured extensively on BBC Radio 3. The Ensemble gave the inaugural Aldeburgh Residencies tour in 2006, contributing five concerts. Several composers have written works for the Ensemble in its full septet formation. Since their formation they have garnered excellent critical reviews; one example being from the *Oxford Times* in 2010; "This most rewarding concert left me with the strong feeling that chamber

music playing doesn't come any better than this".

Magnus Johnston was brought up as part of a locally, well known musical family based in Harpenden, Hertfordshire. Magnus was a founding member of the Johnston Quartet (now the Elias) in which he played for five years. Magnus is the founder and leader of the Aronowitz Ensemble. Sebastian Van Der Kuijk is a multiple prize winner; he studied with Jean Gamard and Philippe Muller in Paris. He received advice from many famous musicians including Pieter Wieselwey, Gary Hoffman, Janos Starker and Gabor Takacs-Nagy.

Sebastian has played with many leading orchestras and performed in recitals all over the world. He has collaborated with composers such as Gyorgy Kurtag, Pierre Boulez and Henri Dutilleux and played at the 90th birthday concert of Dutilleux in Paris during 2006. In 2016 Sebastian was appointed principle cellist of London's Aurora Orchestra.

Tom Hankey is both a violinist and a violist. He studied at the Purcell School and the Royal College of Music. Tom was a founding member of Ensemble Na Mara – a piano quartet/string trio. Tom is committed to contemporary music and has given frequent first performances. He has given many performances as a concerto soloist including Beethoven's Triple Concerto.

Tom Poster studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and won first prize

at the Scottish International Piano Competition in 2007. Tom has performed concertos with conductors such as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Yan Pascal Tortelier, James Loughran and Robin Ticcati. Tom features regularly on BBC Radio 3 and has made multiple appearances at the BBC Proms.

FRANZ SCHUBERT
1797-1828

This piece is new to Cratfield. Franz Schubert, although only living 31 years, wrote an amazing amount of music including 600 songs, operas, symphonies, choral works and 20 piano sonatas. He is considered one of the very greatest chamber music composers with his iconic string quartets, piano trios, an octet and piano quintet, known as *The Trout* and a string quintet which touches the hearts of all music lovers. The Adagio and Rondo Concertante, a one movement Piano Quartet in all essence, is the only one Schubert essayed in the format. Composed in 1816, but not published until 1865, it's a work dominated by the piano and composed to highlight the pianist's virtuosity. Composed before the famous *Trout Quintet*, it's Schubert's first composition combining piano and strings. The first known public performance of this work took place in 1861.

ADAGIO AND RONDO
CONCERTANTE
IN F MAJOR D487
(PIANO QUARTET)
(1816)

About 14 minutes

The *Adagio* opening is about 60 bars long, more an amiable walk in the countryside than a deeply felt utterance. It leads without a break to the main *Rondo* which is marked, *allegro vivace* and the piano solo that starts the section sets the tone for the whole piece, a skittish joyful ride in the

Austrian countryside. Lovely melodies for the strings abound as to be expected from Schubert, the great tunesmith. The music has a similar character to the Trout Quintet, the composer at his most stress-free, a long way from the sometimes utter despair Schubert expresses in many of his late chamber works.

GABRIEL FAURE

1845-1924

This piece is new to Cratfield.

When Faure was young Berlioz was still writing his masterpieces and by the time of his old age Stravinsky had written his *Rite of Spring*. Faure was a link in musical history between traditional and progressive musical styles and was himself a huge influential figure in French music, producing works of exquisite beauty imbuing French sensibility with complex harmony. He made use of the cyclic style of Franz Liszt and Cesar Frank but with much more subtlety. Faure's father was a headmaster and Gabriel, his youngest son was enrolled at a boarding school in Paris, where he received his first musical training. In 1861 Saint-Saens joined the school and introduced the pupils to contemporary composers such as Wagner, Liszt and Schumann. Saint-Saens became Faure's teacher and they became lifelong friends.

In middle age Faure became director of the Paris Conservatoire where in turn became a teacher to the next generation of musicians. His pupils included Maurice Ravel, George Enesco and Nadia Boulanger. Faure made a major contribution to the chamber music repertoire, he composed

two violin sonatas, two cello sonatas, two piano quartets, two piano quintets, a single piano trio and the string quartet. These ten works have enriched the canon of chamber music considerably; performers and audiences alike have become devotees to Faure's uniquely original but accessible chamber music.

FAURE TOWARDS THE
END OF HIS LIFE & HIS
MUSICAL LEGACY:

In 1920 at the age of 75 Faure retired from the conservatoire because of increasing deafness and frailty. In that year he received the Grand-Croix of The Legion d'Honneur, an honour rare for a musician. In 1922 the President of the Republic Alexandre Millerand led a public tribute to Faure, described in *The Musical Times* as "a splendid celebration at the Sorbonne, in which the most illustrious French artists participated, that brought him great joy." It was a poignant spectacle that a man present at a concert of his own works could not hear a single note.

Faure suffered from poor health in his later years; despite this, he remained available to young composers, including members of Les Six, most of whom were devoted to him. In old age he attained a kind of serenity, without losing any of his remarkable spiritual vitality, but removed from the sensualism and the passion of the works he wrote between 1875 and 1895. When Faure died at the age of 79 he was given a state funeral at the Eglise de la Madeleine and is buried in Paris's Passy Cemetery.

After Faure's death, the Conservatoire

abandoned his radicalism and became resistant to new trends; with Faure's own harmonic practice being held up as the farthest limit of modernity, beyond which students should not go. However, the students born between the wars rejected this outdated premise, turning for inspiration to Bartok, the Second Viennese School and the latest works of Stravinsky. In a centenary tribute in 1945, the musicologist Leslie Orrey wrote in the *The Musical Times*: 'More profound than Saint-Saens, more varied than Lalo, more spontaneous than d'Indy, more classic than Debussy, Gabriel Faure is the master *par excellence* of French Music.'

PIANO QUARTET NO.2
IN G MINOR OP.45
(1886)

ALLEGRO MOLTO
MODERATO

ALLEGRO MOLTO

ADAGIO NON TROPPO

ALLEGRO MOLTO

About 34 minutes

The 2nd piano quartet is very much part of Faure's middle period written around the same time as his famous *Requiem*. We know very little about the circumstances of the composition but it was first performed in 1887 with Faure at the piano and the piece was dedicated to Hans Von Bulow. Unlike the popular 1st Piano Quartet in C minor Op.15, the G minor quartet is untypical Faure in as much as three of the four movements are in the main thrusting and energetic in tone with an aggression which we do not usually expect with this composer. Be that as it may, it is a tremendous work nevertheless with some lovely lyrical passages, a beautiful slow movement and the overall construction is tightly knit from the first bar to the last, which makes a satisfying whole.

Following a strong explosive opening in G

minor, a viola solo brings in the 2nd subject in the relative major, B flat. An expressive violin solo calms the music down as it weaves magical harmonic progressions with the development section retaining the lyrical vein as it reaches a beautiful hushed passage of tranquillity. The tempo picks up as it hurtles towards the recapitulation. We're back to the explosive music of the opening and when the same viola solo enters, the key changes to G major. The lyrical music now dominates as it winds down to a quiet close.

The *Allegro molto* 2nd movement in C minor is probably where this piano quartet gets its reputation for being aggressive. It's certainly dark and fiery, not allowing the expressive string passages to in any way dominate proceedings. The more they try the more they get kicked away by the thrusting drive of the piano writing. Faure was obviously getting something off his chest with this short Scherzo!

The slow movement in E flat major is a complete contrast; a gorgeous lyrical outpouring. Following a short piano introduction, the viola has a beautiful solo. The music works towards an ecstatic climax which reappears three times within the movement. But being Faure, he doesn't prolong the climaxes; less is more with this composer. As the viola repeats its lovely solo, the music develops a trance like atmosphere reminding one of Wagner's forest murmurs in his final opera *Parsifal*.

The finale in the home key of G minor is back to the dramatic intensity of the first movement. It has tremendous drive with pounding ostinato's. When the music finally relaxes the key changes into G major but unlike the first movement the energetic thrust dominates and the tempo picks up as the music drives on to an explosive conclusion. The final 20 bars marked *pium mosso* is a masterstroke of form as Faure hints at the Piano Quartet's opening theme – his subtle way of using the cyclic form.

Phew! It's time to draw breath and enjoy a cup of tea and cake.

INTERVAL

Refreshments are offered by a team from the parish, in aid of church funds

JOHANNES BRAHMS
1833-1897

This piece was previously performed during the 2013 Concerts at Cratfield season. Johannes Brahms is considered by many music lovers to be the true heir to the great Ludwig van Beethoven who is the undisputed greatest composer of the early 19th century. However, Brahms is a marmite composer and it's no secret that Benjamin Britten disliked Brahms the composer and his music was rarely programmed at the Aldeburgh Festival during his time at the helm. The Brahms dissenters say that his music is all brown coloured and turgid.

Although writing a programme note is not the proper forum to put forward personal musical likes and dislikes, but praying the

audience's indulgence, I will nail my colours to the wall and declare that Brahms is indeed a very great composer. In my opinion his music, far from being brown, has many shades to his palette. The colours tend to be autumnal which are imbued with deep feelings of regret, nostalgia and time passing and one hears in his music, beautiful haunting melodies that melt the heart. And the scores themselves are tightly constructed without an ounce of fat. Brahms discarded many of his efforts only publishing works that he was entirely satisfied with, so there are no 2nd tier works from this composer as one finds with so many other ones, even Beethoven. Every opus number by Brahms is a substantial composition worth hearing and getting to know. One point that all shades of opinion could agree on, is that Brahms added hugely to the chamber music repertoire with music in all the standard forms of the genre, as well as some with more unusual instrumental combinations. There are three violin sonatas, two cello sonatas, three piano trios, three piano quartets, one piano quintet, one clarinet quintet, two clarinet sonatas, one clarinet/piano/cello trio, two string quintets, two string quartets, two string sextets and one horn/piano/violin trio.

PIANO QUARTET NO.2 IN
A MAJOR OP.26 (1862)

The piano quartet we hear today, No.2 in A major, is longest of the three coming in at about 50 minutes and is in fact one of his longest works. The piano quartet No.1 is Op.25 so the two could be considered as a pair. Although the first piano quartet

contains the wonderful toe-tapping gypsy rondo, the second one is overall a more lyrical work following in the footsteps of the greatest of all tunesmiths, Franz Schubert. The first performance took place on the 29th April 1862, in Vienna, with the composer at the piano and members of the Hellmesberger Quartet.

ALLEGRO NON TROPPO

POCO ADAGIO

SCHERZO: POCO
ALLEGRO

FINALE: ALLEGRO

About 50 minutes

The lengthy first movement in A major, especially when the marked repeat of the exposition is taken, is in sonata form with strong lyrical music dominating the whole movement, rising to passionate intensity at strategic points. The second subject emerges with a beautiful expressive violin solo; the development section moves through several key changes with the home key returning at the start of the recapitulation. A lovely passage for violin and cello anticipates the return of the second subject's expressive violin solo. The music unwinds during the coda but the final bar is marked *forte*.

The second movement in E major is in rondo form. Muted strings accompany the piano's opening melody which leads to arpeggio piano bars; this in turn leads to a beautiful cello solo, taken over by the other two string instruments as the music heads towards a passionate climax. With mutes off, the violin and cello play a lovely passage before the return of the piano in arpeggio manner, as the key changes to F minor for more passionate outbursts. The home key and mutes for the strings return for the final section of this gorgeous *poco adagio* movement.

The third movement is a *scherzo* in A major and trio in D minor and both are in sonata form. The first part is rather tame for a *scherzo*, more of an *intermezzo*, a typical Brahmsian device, the music being of a gentle rocking quality. Following a repeat of the first part, the second part is more forceful and *scherzo* like. The Trio is the opposite; the first part with strong accents, the second more softly focused, which moves into the major key of D before the *scherzo* is repeated in full.

The finale, in A major is one of those Brahms brilliant dance like movements with a touch of Hungarian spice. Perhaps not quite the gypsy helter-skelter of the finale of the first piano quartet but the main theme is a wonderful folk melody, rhythmically vibrant, that you might keep humming all the way home and possibly for days afterwards! The movement is a mix of sonata and rondo form. During the exposition there are passages of deep mellow music lead by the cello. The development is in A minor moving back to the major for the recapitulation which contrast the jaunty syncopation of the main theme with passages of slow languorous music followed by *pizzicato* violin and cello accompanying the piano in tranquil mode. As expected, the music gets faster from the point of the *animato* marking, as the opening tune picks up with a sense of excitement driving towards a magnificent conclusion.

MUSIC ON CD
TODAY'S PERFORMERS
AND WORKS

The Aronowitz Ensemble have recorded on the Sonimage and Hyperion labels: the repertoire includes music by Mendelssohn, Dvorak, Vaughan Williams, Elgar and Barber.

Schubert, Adagio and Rondo Concertante D487: a two disc bargain set on Australian Eloquence by the Beaux Art Trio and the Melos Ensemble of London, which also includes the two piano trios, the Trout Quintet and the Notturmo for Piano Trio.

Faure Piano Quartet No.2 Op.45: a top recommendation for the two Faure piano quartets is Domus on Hyperion on their 30th Anniversary Edition at mid-price. Trio Wanderer with Antoine Tamestit (*viola*) is an excellent alternative at mid-price on Harmonia Mundi.

Brahms Piano Quartet No.2 Op.26: the Schubert Ensemble have recorded the three Brahms Piano Quartets on a two CD set bargain price on Nimbus-Alliance. The 2nd Piano Quartet together with Brahms Clarinet Trio feature on a single disc Onyx recording by the Nash Ensemble at mid-price.

AN EXCERPT FROM
A REVIEW
OF A CONCERT FROM
THE 2015 SEASON
CONCERTS AT CRATFIELD

Sunday 5th July 2015

This Trio, violinist Zsolt-Tihamér Vison-tay, cellist Jamie Walton and pianist Adam Johnson, comprises players distinguished as performers in their own right who also meet to perform in the *North York Moors Chamber Music Festival* each year. They

obviously know each other well and play superbly as a group as well as individually.

Last was one of my own all-time favourites, Ravel's Piano Trio in A minor. Many years in the writing but completed in a hurry at the outbreak of WWI, it was given its first performance at a Red Cross benefit concert in Paris in 1915. There is little useful that I can say about it in a few words except that, to me, it is one of the very greatest chamber works of the twentieth century, and that, especially in as outstanding a performance as it received here, is always an experience to be treasured.

John Sims

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