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A “virtual” Coffee Concert recorded at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford

Sunday November 29, 2020 at 11:15

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We very much hope you enjoy this concert. If you would like to become a patron of the Oxford Coffee Concerts or make a donation to help support our “virtual” concerts, please get in touch with us via the contact page at coffeeconcerts.com.

This is one of the virtual Coffee Concerts recorded and streamed from our YouTube channel at 11:15 on Sunday mornings throughout autumn 2020. (These concerts will be available for a limited time after release.)

The Gould Piano Trio

- **Mozart: Piano Trio in G major, K 564**
- **Schubert: Adagio in E flat major, D 897 (“Notturmo”)**
- **Ravel: Piano Trio in A minor**

The Gould Piano Trio Lucy Gould (violin) Benjamin Frith (piano) Richard Lester (cello) The Gould Piano Trio, directly compared to the great Beaux Arts Trio for their “musical fire” and “dedication to the genre” in the Washington Post, have remained at the forefront of the international chamber music scene for over a quarter of a century.

Launched by their first prize at the Melbourne Chamber Music Competition and subsequently selected as YCAT Artists, they were “Rising Stars”, making a highly successful debut at New York’s Weill Recital Hall, described by Strad Magazine as “Pure Gould”. Their many appearances at London’s Wigmore Hall have included the complete piano trios of Dvorak, Mendelssohn and Schubert, plus in the 2017-18 season, a

Beethoven cycle to celebrate 25 years since their first appearance at this iconic venue.

The trio’s diverse discography includes the main masterpieces of the repertoire, but also many neglected gems, often rediscovered through artistic collaboration. Cycles of Brahms and Dvorak (Champs Hill), Hummel (Naxos) and Beethoven (Somm) – recorded live at St George’s, Bristol – are complimented by single composer discs of the late romantic British repertoire with clarinetist, Robert Plane. The complete Stanford, Ireland, York Bowen, Robin Milford and Cyril Scott were followed by an entirely contemporary disc containing the piano trios of Sir James MacMillan, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Sally Beamish.

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Commissioning and performing new works is an important part of the trio's philosophy of staying creative and freshly inspired.

MacMillan's 2nd Piano Trio was commissioned by them and premiered at the Bath International Festival in 2014. In 2016, Simon Roland Jones graced the Goulds with his new trio, entitled "Eidford" (premiered at the North Norfolk Festival) and the next year saw them featured in the Hull "City of Culture", performing former BBC Young Musician Mark Simpson's graphically inspired piece for them, "After Avedon", as part of the PRS's New Music Biennial.

For Robert Plane's festival in Corbridge, the trio celebrated its 20th year with a commission for Clarinet and Piano Trio from Huw Watkins, entitled Four Fables. This perennially popular event provides scope for

the performance of many forms of chamber music and the opportunity to explore the repertoire with choice musical partners. Similarly, in "The Venue" at Leeds during 2017-18 the trio curated a whole season of six concerts entitled "Russia in Revolution"; a multifaceted delve into this exciting period.

The Goulds have made extensive tours of North America, the Far East and New Zealand, and have performed throughout Europe. In addition to concertising, they have given master classes at the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, Dartington, RWCMD and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where, they enjoy discussing interpretation with the most promising young ensembles of our day.

More information:
<http://www.gouldpianotrio.com/>.

Piano Trio in G major, K 564 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

1. Allegro; 2. Theme and variations; 3. Allegretto

In October 1788, Mozart wrote his last work in the genre, the Piano Trio in G major, K564. It is a sign of the times that it was first published in England, not in Vienna. And it is a sign of the conservative tastes of publishers and public that when it was finally issued in Vienna the following year, it was still advertised, like its predecessors, as being "for harpsichord or forte piano with the accompaniment of a violin and violoncello".

Mozart may have led the new fashion for the piano, but many households still had their harpsichords, and the predominant model for piano trios was still the 'accompanied sonatas', which Haydn was to continue writing long after Mozart's death in 1791.

Indeed, this trio has a rather more 'domestic' feel than those Mozart wrote earlier in the year. It is simpler and shorter, perhaps aimed deliberately at the amateur market rather than for Mozart himself to play. Some writers have been disappointed to find this lighter work at the end of Mozart's sequence of trios, and it is true that it says what it has to say without unnecessary complication. But Mozart at his most direct is just as difficult to play as Mozart at his most subtle and complex. He gives the impression of having put every note in precisely the right place, creating elegant and lyrical structures that require absolute clarity and precision. And if one imagines eavesdropping on friends playing at home, rather than the formality of concert

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presentation, this elegant and charming piece seems completely in its element.

The first movement is a fluent and rippling Allegro, with a second theme which is very closely related to the first, and a middle section that rather than develop existing material, starts with an entirely new theme (as in the earlier two trios). These are examples of the subtle ways in which Mozart subverts expectations, even in an apparently straightforward piece of music.

The Andante is a set of variations on a

melody almost like a slow minuet, though with a hint of sadness in the harmonies of its last few bars. And the finale opens with a naïve little tune in the dotted rhythm of a siciliano. Its very simplicity enables Mozart to suggest shifts of mood with the deftest of touches: a move to a minor key clouds the atmosphere while maintaining the lively rhythm; another episode swings the music into a peasant dance. And the ending is a delight, with the instruments answering each other in wistful counterpoint, suggesting, as so often in Mozart, that deeper thoughts were all the time lurking beneath the tranquil surface.

Adagio in E flat major, D 897 (“Notturmo”) by Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

It is thought Schubert’s Notturmo was originally intended as the second movement of his Piano Trio in B flat, D898, composed in the autumn of 1827. The manuscript of that Trio is lost, but studies have shown that the Adagio was written on a type of paper identical to that which Schubert used for two other works composed around the same time: the E flat Piano Trio and the fair copy of his 1827 song-cycle Winterreise (Winter Journey). That being the case, though, we do not know why he decided to remove it and replace it with a new movement.

The Adagio was given the title “Notturmo” when it was published in 1846. The opening theme, an undulating melody for the violin and cello with a harp-like accompaniment for the piano, is an example of Schubert’s uncanny ability to make time appear to stand still. For the more strenuous central section the music moves up a semitone, and the metre changes from a very slow two-in-a-bar to a quicker three. The opening theme returns, only to be interrupted again by the music of the central passage, before a short final appearance brings this haunting work to a close.

Piano Trio by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

1. Modéré; 2. Pantoum. Assez vif; 3. Passacaille. Très large; 4. Final, Animé.

Ravel first began thinking about writing a piano trio in 1908, but it was not until March 1914 that he actually began work on it. The first movement was written quickly, but by July he was making very slow progress.

France’s entry into World War I seems to have been the spur to his completing the work, which he did by the beginning of September. “I did five month’s work in five

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weeks”, he wrote to a friend. “I wanted to finish my trio before enlisting.”

When he started the Trio, Ravel had for some years been preoccupied with ideas for a rhapsody for piano and orchestra on Basque themes. He was born in his Basque mother’s home town and he felt a strong affinity with the region all his life. The Trio opens with a theme which Ravel described as “Basque in colour”, and its very distinctive rhythm comes from sketches for the uncompleted rhapsody. The slower second main theme shares with it that feeling of deliciously poised, cool lyricism which is one of Ravel’s most characteristic moods.

All three instruments have some breathtakingly virtuoso writing in the effervescent second movement. This borrows its title, ‘Pantoum’, from a Malaysian verse form very much in vogue among 19th century French poets such as Baudelaire and Verlaine. It defines a carefully structured

relationship between two contrasting ideas which, in Ravel’s case, are the spiky, toccata-like opening theme, and the more lyrical second one. In the central section the piano plays a broad chorale-like tune while the violin and cello continue with the previous music.

The third movement is a passacaglia – a structure based on a repeating theme in the bass. Ravel’s theme, first heard in the piano’s lowest register, gradually rises through the ensemble as the music becomes both more complex and more passionate. It reaches a peak of intensity and then gradually sinks back to the depths from where it came. The finale follows without a break, and the effect is like stepping out of a darkened interior into dazzling sunlight. The music builds swiftly to a radiant climax with the violin and cello trilling ecstatically above a sonorous piano part. A second build-up, longer this time, and urged on by the piano’s trumpet-like fanfares, ends the trio in an irresistible surge of energy.

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Virtual Oxford Coffee Concerts coming up...

Sunday December 6, 2020

Adderbury Ensemble
directed by David Le Page
with Fiona Cross (clarinet)

- Mozart: String Quartet no 14 in G major, K 387 (“Spring”)
- Mozart: Clarinet Quintet in A major, K 581

Sunday December 13, 2020

Maria Wloszczowska
(violin), Steffan Morris
(cello) and Dinis Sousa
(piano)

- Haydn: Piano Trio no 45 in E flat major, Hob XV:29
- Schubert: Piano Trio in B flat major, D 898

Sunday December 20, 2020

Kaleidoscope Chamber
Collective

- Walker: Lyric for Strings
- Beach: Romance for Violin and Piano, op 23
- Elgar: Piano Quintet in A minor, op 84
- Mancini: Moon River