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

Sunday March 7, 2021 at 11:15

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Virtual Coffee Concerts are pre-recorded at the Holywell Music Room in Oxford and are streamed from our YouTube channel at 11:15 on Sunday mornings. (These recordings are available for a limited time after release but, of course, there will be more to come.)

The Adderbury Ensemble

- **Dvořák: String Quintet no 3 in E flat major, op 97**
- **Beethoven: String Quartet no 4 in C minor, op 18 no 4**

Martyn Jackson (violin)
Jenny Sacha (violin)
Chris Windass (viola)
Vanessa McNaught (viola)
Jane Fenton (cello)

Formed in 1986 by a group of the UK's finest young freelance musicians, the Adderbury Ensemble have always had a flexible line-up, mixing and matching different players to deliver performances primarily as quartets, quintets or small chamber groups and occasionally adding further instruments to play symphonies and concertos by the likes of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn or Brahms – with or without a conductor.

Everyone who performs as part of the Adderbury Ensemble is an eminent instrumentalist, usually a principal player with one or more of the leading orchestras of

Europe. From their early years playing Sunday evening concerts in the beautiful village of Adderbury in north Oxfordshire, the group have gone on to develop a global reputation. They perform regularly throughout Britain and other European nations, and played their first concerts in the United States in Spring 2016. They also helped found the world-famous Oxford Coffee Concerts at the Holywell Music Room, the oldest purpose-built music venue in Europe.

The Adderbury Ensemble have released ten recordings in their own right since their first CD was released in 1997, and individual members have recorded many more, either as soloists or as members of other groups.

More information:

<https://www.adderburyensemble.com/>

String Quintet no 3 in E flat major, op 97
by Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

1. Allegro non tanto; 2. Allegro vivo; 3. Larghetto; 4. Finale. Allegro giusto.

In May 1893 Dvořák took a holiday from his job as Director of the National Conservatory in New York, which he had begun the previous October. Together with his family he spent the summer in the Czech settlement in Spilville, Iowa, and it turned out to be the happiest period of his stay in America. The surroundings were idyllic, the people welcoming, and he felt thoroughly at home. Within a few days he was at work on one of his sunniest pieces, the String Quartet in F, known as the 'American'. Three days after finishing it he began this String Quintet.

While he was staying in Spilville a group of American Indians visited the settlement. Dvořák encouraged them to perform their songs and dances at the local inn, and there has been considerable speculation as to the extent of any influence on the Quintet. The opening movement's second theme certainly shares the melodic shape of a phrase from one of their songs noted down by Josef Jan Kovařík, a young violinist who was acting as Dvořák's secretary, though Dvořák re-shaped it to make it more suitable for his purposes. But that in turn incorporates a jerky figure which suggests a native Indian drum rhythm.

A short unaccompanied phrase for the second viola begins the first movement. The

opening is repeated, beginning with a cello solo and given a typical Dvořák twist from major to minor. The main body of the movement then gets under way with a violin theme (a speeded-up version of that opening phrase) over a sustained chord on the middle strings. The jerky rhythm soon makes itself felt, and underpins much of the rest of the movement.

The second viola again leads off the scherzo with a rapid repeated-note rhythm (another drum-figure?) which introduces a lively dance-tune. In the minor-key trio section the first viola plays a yearning, song-like theme which is repeated by the first violin. In its original form the theme which opens the third movement was the first thing Dvořák sketched after he arrived in America. At one stage he considered using it as a setting of the hymn 'My country, 'tis of thee'. It is followed by five variations, in which Dvořák explores a remarkable variety of string textures and effects.

The finale is propelled by a rather Schubertian galloping rhythm. The mood is one of uncomplicated enjoyment, as one delightful theme follows another, leading to an exuberantly sonorous conclusion.

String Quartet no 4 in C minor, op 18 no 4 by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

**1. Allegro ma non tanto; 2. Scherzo. Andante scherzoso quasi allegretto;
3. Menuetto. Allegretto; 4. Allegro - prestissimo.**

When Beethoven settled in Vienna in 1792 it was as a pianist that he first made his name. To build a reputation as a composer he seems to have had a deliberate plan, centring on his own performances (several piano sonatas and two concertos), as well as carefully avoiding the string quartet and the symphony, genres particularly associated with his teacher, Haydn. His first large-scale works for string ensemble were for trio – not a limbering-up exercise for writing quartets as has sometimes been supposed, since the medium is actually a trickier one to handle successfully. It was not until 1798 that he began work on a group of six quartets, by which time Haydn had composed his last completed set of quartets.

In spite of the confidence shown in his earlier works, Beethoven seems, like Mozart before him, to have had problems writing quartets. He radically revised Nos 1 and 2 of the Op 18 set, and possibly No 3 as well, before they reached their final form. Sending the new version of No 1 to his violinist friend Karl Amenda in 1801, he commented “...only now do I know how to write quartets properly”.

Beethoven’s C minor works have prompted any number of rough-and-ready generalisations about their sharing a

particular stormy, tragic mood. The C minor Quartet, though, is simply serious rather than turbulent, with room for mellower ideas. The first movement accommodates a lyrically smiling second theme (derived from the first, a technique that Haydn himself often used). Instead of the expected slow movement comes a moderately-paced scherzo whose deliberately stolid fugal and canonic textures are disrupted by irregular phrase-lengths and off-beat accents, to delightfully tongue-in-cheek effect.

The minuet returns to the serious mood of the first movement, while its central trio section lightens the atmosphere, with its grace and elegance emphasised by its curious scoring, with the second violin in dialogue with the lower two instruments and the first violin’s rapid triplets fluttering overhead.

Haydn is recalled again in the rondo finale, with a main theme like a minor-key version of the so-called ‘Gypsy Rondo’ from the older composer’s Piano Trio in G. The mood is again serious but the prestissimo coda ends with a wry smile, its quiet ending subverted by a gruff fortissimo gesture at the last moment.

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