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

**Sunday March 21, 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 Echéa Quartet**

- **Haydn: String Quartet in B minor, op 33 no 1, Hob III:37**
- **Stravinsky: Three Pieces for String Quartet**
- **Mozart: String Quartet no 23 in F major, K 590 (“Prussian” no 3)**

Aliayta Foon-Dancoes (Violin)  
Rosa Hartley (Violin)  
David Shaw (Viola)  
Eliza Millett (cello)

Recipients of the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Albert and Eugenie Frost Chamber Music Prize (2019/20), the Echéa Quartet were formed in 2017 at the Royal Academy of Music, London. The quartet are recent winners of the “Tremplin” at the Philharmonie de Paris’s String Quartet Biennale (2020) and International Anton Rubinstein Competition (2017) prizewinners. They are also currently Chamber Music Fellows at the Royal College of Music, artists for the Concordia and City Music Foundations (2019/20), and Yeomen of the Worshipful Company of Musicians.

The Echéa Quartet are mentored by John Myerscough, Simon Rowland-Jones and Mathieu Herzog. Thanks to the Harrison-Frank and City Music Foundations, the

quartet are fortunate to play on a quartet of WE Hill & Sons instruments and bows (2019).

The Echéa Quartet have appeared at international festivals such as Ferrandou Musique (France), Festival de los Siete Lagos (Argentina) and West Cork Chamber Music (Ireland). They have also attended a residency at the Banff Centre (2019). They have performed in venues such as the Musikverein (Vienna), Wigmore Hall (London) and Philharmonie de Paris, and have collaborated with Marin Alsop at the World Economic Forum (Switzerland).

The Echéa Quartet have featured on BBC Radio 3’s “In Tune”, and more recently on CBC National Radio (Canada) as part of their 6-week tour of the west coast of North America (2019). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the quartet were unable to attend IMS Prussia Cove and Festival d’Aix-en-Provence. They will however be Fellows

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for the Advanced String Quartet Program at Aspen Summer Music Festival, 2021. The Echéa Quartet's continued dedication to new music is central to their work. They have commissioned works by UK-based composers, including Louise Drewett, Freya Waley-Cohen and Robert Laidlow. More

widely, the quartet have worked closely with Harrison Birtwistle and Andrew Norman, and are working this year with Mark Anthony-Turnage.

More information:

<https://echeaquartet.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/echeaquartet>

<https://www.instagram.com/echeaquartet>

## **String Quartet in B minor, op 33 no 1, Hob III:37**

***by Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)***

**1. Allegro moderato; 2. Scherzo. Allegro di molto; 3. Andante; 4. Finale. Presto.**

With the six quartets of op 33, written in 1781, Haydn had his first opportunity to follow up the hard-won technical mastery of his op 20 set of nearly ten years before. He wrote to a number of potential subscribers to tell them about their impending publication, commenting that they were “written in a new and special way”. There has been a lot of speculation as to what he meant by this. It may have been no more than shrewd salesmanship. But there is a sense that in the op 33 quartets Haydn no longer has anything to prove, whether to himself, to players or to listeners.

The emotional range is less extreme than in op 20, and the strenuous counterpoint of the earlier set, particularly the fugal finales, is not such a prominent feature. In op 33 his quartet writing reaches a new level of subtlety and sophistication, a fact which he seems to have acknowledged by two significant changes of title. He no longer calls the works “divertimento”, as he had all his earlier pieces for the medium, but “quartet”. Also, he drops the title “minuet” for the quick inner movements in favour of “scherzo” or “scherzando”. While the movements themselves remain firmly in Haydn's earlier minuet style, the change of title alerts us to

the way his characteristic wit marks the set as a whole, with jokes and surprises liable to pop up at any point.

Having said that, it must be conceded that there are few, if any, jokes in op 33 no 1. Each of Haydn's sets of six quartets includes one work in a minor key (op 20 has two), and this is the most serious and subdued of op 33. There is, though, a surprise, at the very opening. The first movement starts out in what sounds for all the world like D major. It is only in the third bar that the music settles in B minor, an unusual key for music of this period.

Detached articulation and staccato repeated notes give the outer sections of the scherzo a boisterous rhythmic springiness to which the B major central section offers a complete contrast, with its more flowing melodic contours and smoother phrasing.

It is perhaps the slow (or slow-ish) movements of op 33 that demonstrate Haydn's “new and special manner” most clearly. The expansive aria-like character of the equivalent movements in Op 20 has now become something terser, more concentrated, less dominated by the first

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violin. The andante of Op 33 no 1 has an outward gracefulness and elegance, but there are nerves of steel underneath.

The finale is brisk and buoyant, but also blunt and to the point – a bracing end to this, the most serious-minded of Haydn's Op 33 quartets.

### **Three Pieces for String Quartet by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)**

After the colossal forces and epic scale of his ballet "The Rite of Spring", premiered in 1913, Stravinsky spent the next few years exploring the possibilities of small-scale works for small ensembles.

These three pieces, written in 1914 and dedicated to the Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet, are short, concentrated studies which focus on particular textures and moods. All three are constructed from small motifs, either juxtaposed or layered, and repeated in varying combinations.

They were originally published without titles or headings, but when Stravinsky orchestrated them in 1928 as the first three of his "Four Studies for Orchestra" he gave them titles – "Dance", "Eccentric" and "Canticle", respectively.

The first piece, originally for piano duet, is fast and rhythmically incisive. The first violin melody continuously turns back on itself within a narrow range of notes, suggesting an affinity with Russian folk music, while the second violin repeatedly butts in with a falling four-note scale, the viola holds a continuous

drone, and the cello plays a repeated rhythmic pattern. The piece plays out the shifting relationships between its various layers of material almost like a mechanism which Stravinsky has wound up and let go. No 2, Stravinsky later said, was inspired by seeing the clown Little Tich performing in London. The main material, with its jerky, spasmodic rhythm is constantly interrupted by subversive asides – silvery little fanfares on harmonics, gentle arpeggio figures or rough, aggressive gestures.

Stravinsky was particularly proud of the last piece, calling the final twenty bars "some of my best music of that time". Mostly played pianissimo, it has a solemn liturgical flavour which suggests Russian Orthodox chant, something that would become an increasingly prominent element in his music.

Making unusual demands on quartet technique, these three pieces by-pass the Western string quartet legacy in a way which can still seem startling today. They are very much the work of an outsider coming fresh to the string quartet with no pre-conceived ideas about tradition or style.

## **String Quartet no 23 in F major, K 590 (“Prussian” no 3) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**

**1. Allegro moderato; 2. Andante; 3. Menuetto; 4. Allegro.**

It is curious that the two great composers of the second half of the Eighteenth Century, Haydn and Mozart, perfectly complement each other as composers. Haydn excelled in the field of the symphony sonata and string quartet, whereas Mozart specialised in opera, concerto and string quintet. Haydn wrote a long series of masterpieces in the field of the string quartet, reaching such a level of mastery that Mozart modelled a set of his own quartets on those of Haydn. These have become known confusingly as the “Haydn Quartets” and are dedicated to the older master in recognition of his influence. There are six works in this group.

After the “Haydn Quartets”, Mozart did not return to medium until the last years of his life, and then it would appear that it was his dire financial situation that brought this about. Early in 1789 Mozart embarked on a tour of northern Germany by way of Prague, Dresden and Leipzig, finishing up in Berlin. One of the aims of this tour was for Mozart to gain first-hand experience of the music of J S Bach. The main purpose however was more mundane. Mozart was desperately short of money and was looking for lucrative engagements and commissions for new compositions. Although the concerts he gave in north Germany were well received, they were not particularly profitable, and the main outcome of the journey seems to have been two commissions from the Berlin court. In a letter to one of his creditors soon after his

return to Vienna, Mozart wrote that he was writing “six easy clavier sonatas for Princess Frederike” (the eldest daughter of King Frederick II of Prussia) and “six quartets for the king”. Mozart only finished one of the sonatas and three of the quartets - the so-called “Prussian Quartets”. The quartet to be heard in today’s concert, K 590 in F major is the last of the three.

The Prussian king was a keen amateur cellist and Mozart, eager to please, ensured that the cello was endowed with a prominent part. In so doing he was risking an imbalance and to preserve this he gave all parts in turn soloistic material. The “Prussian Quartets” gave Mozart a great deal of trouble. He even wrote of the “exhausting labour” involved in the composition of them. Nevertheless, he still managed to produce his opera “Cosi fan Tutte” while he was struggling with the quartets. Perhaps Mozart felt that the brilliant concertante writing he gave to all four-string instruments was more naturally deployed in opera or the concerto as he abandoned the form after this work. No doubt Mozart’s instinct was correct, or the “concertante quartet” turned out to be a blind alley, shunned by subsequent composers of quartets. The Prussian Quartets nevertheless contain a wealth of wonderful music despite their troubled origins.

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