

Seaford Music Society

Sunday 11th March 2018 at 3.00 pm

Divertimenti Ensemble

Paul Barritt, Rachel Isserlis *Violins*
Jonathan Barritt *Viola*
Josephine Horder, Sebastian Comberti *Cellos*

Formed in London in 1978, the Divertimenti Ensemble has established itself as one of the most exciting and innovative British chamber groups of its generation, and has appeared throughout the UK and abroad at major festivals and music societies.

Early interest was attracted by recordings of Mozart (Meridian), Colin Matthews (Auracle), rare quartets by Howells and Dyson (Helios) and the Mendelssohn and Bargiel octets (a highly acclaimed recording for Hyperion).

Since then, Divertimenti has developed a reputation for liveliness in both performance and programming. The ensemble concentrates on works requiring the forces of a string quintet with two cellos, and has re-discovered many exciting and beautiful works for this combination by, amongst others, Borodin, Brahms, Frank Martin, Ethel Smyth, Taniev, Onslow, Catoire, Joseph Miroslav Weber and Bax.

Most recently, Divertimenti gave the first performance in modern times of Arnold Bax's Quintet No.1, included on a CD of the composer's hitherto unrecorded chamber works, released in 2004 on the Dutton Epoch label.

A new work to celebrate Divertimenti's 40th Anniversary has been commissioned from the composer Sally Beamish, herself a former member of the group. Entitled "DIVERTIMENTI!", it will receive its premiere during the 2018/19 Season.

LUIGI BOCCHERINI (1743-1805)

Musica Notturna delle Strade di Madrid (*Night Music of the Streets of Madrid*), Op.30, No.6

The Italian composer Luigi Boccherini was attached to the Court of the Spanish Infante, Luis Antonio, brother of King Charles III of Spain. Because the Infante had married a commoner, King Charles had exiled him from the Madrid Court to the Arenas de San Pedro palace in Ávila province. As a courtier of Luis Antonio, Boccherini joined the exile, and during this time he completed more than one hundred pieces.



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Musica Notturna delle Strade di Madrid, composed during this time, describes the bustling streets of night-time Madrid. About the composition, critic Jaume Tortella writes: “Taking its inspiration from nocturnal street scenes of Madrid, it seems to look back nostalgically to the gaiety and bustle of Spain’s capital, recalling the sound of the city’s church bells ringing for evening prayer, the popular dances that were the delight of its young people, and the blind beggars singing their typical *viellas de rueda* until the soldiers from the local garrison sound the midnight curfew with their Retreat.”

Although the composition was famous in Spain during Boccherini’s life, it was not published until some years after his death, because, he told his publisher, “The piece is absolutely useless, even ridiculous, outside Spain, because the audience cannot hope to understand its significance, nor the performers to play it as it should be played.” However, the mid-twentieth-century revival of interest in Boccherini’s music proved that his music is both understandable and playable outside Spain, as today’s concert demonstrates.

The work consists of seven short movements:

1. *Le campane de l’Ave Maria* (The Ave Maria Bell) – the main church calls the faithful for the Ave Maria prayers
2. *Il tamburo dei Soldati* (The Soldiers’ drum)
3. *Minuetto dei Ciechi* (Minuet of the Blind Beggars)
4. *Il Rosario (Largo assai, allegro, largo come prima)* (The Rosary)
5. *Passa Calle (Allegro vivo)* – the Passacaglia of the Street Singers, known as *Los Manolos*. In Spanish, *pasacalle* denotes “pass along the street”, singing as one seeks amusement
6. *Il tamburo* (The Drum)
7. *Ritirata (Maestoso)* – The retreat of the Madrid military night watch; the Watch’s patrol, announcing the curfew and closing the streets for the night

JOSEPH MIROSLAV WEBER (1854-1906)

String Quintet in D major (1898)

- I *Allegro ma non troppo – Wie die Herrn ‘Professoren’ componirt haben wollten*
- II *Scherzo: Vivo – Jugendlicher Übermuth*
- III *Adagio: Con molto sentimento – Sehnsucht nach dem Vaterlande*
- IV *Finale: Presto – Auf dem Lande*

Joseph Miroslav Weber was born in 1854 in Prague, at that time a German city. At six years old he began violin studies with his father, a conductor at the German Theatre, and by the age of eight gave a recital before the Emperor Ferdinand of Austria. He enrolled at the Prague Conservatory in 1870, studying violin with Ferdinand Laub and Antonín Bennewitz, the latter known as a progressive artist and champion of Czech music. He also enhanced his organ skills under the guidance of Joseph Krejčí.

Weber graduated from the Conservatory in 1873 and almost immediately assumed the post of solo violinist at the court chapel in Sondershausen, the tiny Thuringian capital of the Schwarzburg-Sonderhausen principality. It was here, according to Edmund Van der Straeten’s *The History of the Violin*, that Weber “was stimulated to acquaint himself with the treasures of chamber music”. Weber’s all-round talents were further developed when he assumed the post of conductor for the summer opera season in Prague in 1874.

Besides being a violinist of ‘high virtuosity’ with a ‘wonderful sweet tone’, and also a fine pianist, Weber became increasingly recognized as an inventive composer. In 1891 his Second String Quartet won a prize in St Petersburg, and in 1896 his Septet ‘Aus meinem Leben’ impressed the Vienna Tonkünstler-Verein jury, Brahms among them, and took second prize ahead of Zemlinsky’s Clarinet Trio. Then, in 1898, his recently completed String Quintet in D major received a prestigious prize in Prague.

Weber's String Quintet in D major includes poetic-programmatic movement titles and conscious musical metaphors. The first movement raises the curtain in a style 'as the Herr "Professors" would want to compose' ('Wie die Herrn "Professoren" componirt haben wollten'). With a song-like principal theme and a yearning, increasingly impassioned, central development, Weber unfolds an unashamed counter-argument to Eduard Hanslick's formalist concept of composition and its denial of music's powers of emotional expression. "The professor is the German national disease," observed one critic at the time.

The first movement's lyrical nature gives way to the 'Youthful high spirits' ('Jugendlicher Übermuth') of the *Scherzo*, reminiscent at times of the Obkročák, or hop dance. Swift changes of mode between major and minor underline the movement's Czech ancestry, which is also reflected in the expression marking 'with overflowing high spirits' that spices the modified return of the main theme before the launch of the prestissimo coda.

The notions of German romanticism, *Heimweh* ('homesickness') and *Heimkehr* ('homecoming'), take centre stage in the *Adagio*, combined under the title 'Longing for the Fatherland' ('Sehnsucht nach dem Vaterlande'). The overtly nostalgic mood derives from elements set out in the dream-like opening bars, not least the interval of an augmented fourth and the 'cradle-song' big tune. But sentiment never clouds the clarity of Weber's writing, which explores various states of longing and even offers a central vision of homecoming contentment with a long-breathed statement of the lullaby melody from the first cello.

Cares and woes evaporate with a final movement journey 'In the Country' ('Auf dem Lande'), in a tempo 'somewhat faster than that of the Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*'. Fragments and prolonged statements of material from earlier movements serve as landmarks in the movement's soundscape, with recollections of the *Scherzo* leaving the strongest impression.

Programme note courtesy of Andrew Stewart

INTERVAL 20 MINUTES

Refreshments will be served in the Wesley Room.

Toilets are located next to the corridor leading to the Wesley Room.

CDs of Divertimenti Ensemble, including Weber's *String Quintet*, can be purchased at the ticket desk.

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

String Quintet in C major, Op. 163, D 956

- I *Allegro ma non troppo*
- II *Adagio*
- III *Scherzo: Presto – Trio: Andante sostenuto*
- IV *Allegretto*

This is one of Schubert's last works, and it is clear from the moods conveyed in it that he knew he was seriously ill and perhaps close to death. Acting on medical advice, in August 1828 Schubert went to visit his brother Ferdinand in the country. There he had a bout of illness, but by October he had recovered sufficiently to resume composition.

Schubert chose unusual instrumentation for this work. Instead of following the Mozartian tradition of two violins, two violas and cello, he replaced the second viola with a second cello. This gives a richer sonority that lends itself to writing in a style that is more orchestra-like than usual for a string quintet. It also provides opportunities for many fascinating combinations of tone colour between the various instruments.

The first movement of the *Quintet* reflects Schubert's hard and painful struggle against overwhelming odds. The principal theme is powerless and resigned, and the development expresses the composer's anguish. An astounding change of mood occurs with the introduction of the subsidiary theme, which expresses hope, the antithesis of despair, and eventually this dominates the movement.

The E major *Adagio* begins gently, but the mood is interrupted by agitated triplets, anxious syncopations, and a seething unrest, against which are set far-flung curves of sorrow-laden melody that are thrilling in their intensity. The gentle opening returns, but shortly before the end a reminiscence of the frightful F minor episode forces its way back.

Full of feverish energy, the *Scherzo* comes charging in and brushes aside the resigned beginning, and the peaceful *Adagio*, with its terrifying episode. The *Trio* brings serious thoughts again, even the shadows of death. The inner meaning of this movement seems to be intentionally beyond any conceivable interpretation; H J Moser called it the most terrifying requiem mood in the whole literature of chamber music.

As the *Finale* begins, not in the liberating key of C major but in the sombre key of C minor, it is clear that the *Scherzo* was merely an episode. The movement is in sonata form, but its structural irregularities give it a rondo-like feel. The C minor beginning eventually leads to a lilting second subject that is as important as the first theme. Later, the two cellos present a third melody that is set against calm, undulating figures on the other three instruments. The rondo theme is recalled and developed at considerable length. The recapitulation begins with the second theme with its corollary of happy triplet figuration on the first violin. The brisk coda recalls the principal theme, and the work concludes abruptly.

Programme note courtesy of Making Music / Ted Wilks

Forthcoming concerts:

Sunday 22nd April, 3.00 pm, at St Leonard's Church, Seaford

World-renowned cellist **Raphael Wallfisch**, accompanied by pianist **John York**. If you are not a member of Seaford Music Society, we recommend that you purchase your ticket in advance, from Newberry Tully Estate Agents or from our Treasurer, Paul Moore. Details are on the leaflet available at the desk at the entrance to the church.

Sunday 20th May, 4.00 pm, at St Leonard's Church, Seaford (please note the starting time)

Family concert: The Enchanted Violin and other tales. A concert for the whole family, with free entry for children, who will be especially welcome. The concert will last about an hour.

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday 8th July (afternoon). The formal notice will be sent to all members closer to the time, but please put the date in your diary now. We would love to hear from any members who would like to join the committee.

***** Can you help us? *****

As a small charity we do not need to have our accounts formally audited, but after they are prepared in May they should be Independently Examined. Could you be our Independent Examiner? You do not have to be a Member of the Seaford Music Society to do this.

Do come and have a word with us, at the desk at the back of the church, if you can help, or would like more information. We look forward to seeing you!