

Seaford Music Society

Sunday 12th February 2023 at 3.00 pm

London Mozart Players Chamber Ensemble

Ruth Rogers	<i>Violin</i>
Simon Blendis	<i>Violin</i>
Sijie Chen	<i>Violin</i>
Antonia Kesel	<i>Violin</i>
Judith Busbridge	<i>Viola</i>
Sophie Renshaw	<i>Viola</i>
Sebastian Comberti	<i>Cello</i>
Tom Isaac	<i>Cello</i>

Founded in 1949 by Harry Blech to delight audiences with the works of Mozart and Haydn, over the last 72 years the London Mozart Players has developed an outstanding reputation for adventurous, ambitious programming, from Baroque through to genre-crossing contemporary music. It continues to build on its long history of association with many of the world's finest artists including Sir James Galway, Dame Felicity Lott, Jane Glover, Howard Shelley, Nicola Benedetti, John Suchet and Simon Callow. The orchestra enjoys an international reputation, touring throughout Europe and the Far East – most recently Dubai and Hong Kong – and records for Naxos, Chandos, Signum, Hyperion, Convivium Records and the German label CPO.

The LMP has been the resident orchestra at Croydon's Fairfield Halls for thirty years, and in September 2019 enjoyed a gala concert to celebrate the Halls' reopening. During the closure of Fairfield Halls for refurbishment, the orchestra took classical music to new and unusual venues across Croydon in its award-winning three-year series #LMPOnTheMove. This saw the ensemble pushing the perceived boundaries of classical music performance in the borough, welcoming new audiences and partnerships. Events included a live film score played on top of a shopping mall car park, a house music set at Boxpark with young DJ/producer Shift K3Y, free concerts in libraries for children, and a series of musical initiatives in Centrale.

As one of the original pioneers of orchestral outreach work, LMP has enjoyed a host of relationships with schools and music hubs across the UK (and recently in Dubai and Hong Kong), working with teachers and heads of music to inspire the next generation of musicians and music lovers. As well as working with schools, LMP continues its long-established tradition of promoting young up-and-coming musicians. Nicola Benedetti, Jacqueline du Pré and Jan Pascal Tortelier were just three of many young musical virtuosos championed early in their careers by the orchestra.

The LMP enjoys a special relationship with its audience and has thriving Friends and Sponsors programmes. The orchestra always tries to break down the 'fourth' wall between musicians and audience, and this is achieved in part as the orchestra is self-directed. LMP is the only professional orchestra in the UK to be managed both operationally and artistically by the players. The orchestra has enjoyed the patronage of HRH The Earl of Wessex since 1988



Seaford Music Society gratefully acknowledges the support of Newberry Tully Estate Agents

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

String Quintet in F major, K.497 (arr. Franz Hoffmeister)

- I *Adagio – Allegro di molto*
- II *Andante*
- III *Allegro*

Today we hear the 1802 Hoffmeister arrangement of this Mozart work, originally written as a Sonata for Piano Four-Hands. A jewel among Mozart's four-hand works, the magistral Sonata in F major, K.497, was composed only shortly after *Le Nozze di Figaro* had its Vienna premiere, in August 1786.

The work represents Mozart at the peak of his career as a composer. It is a highly personal work that carries the four-hand genre far beyond the domestic context. It is characterized by a lively interchange between the two players, contrapuntal thinking, bold appoggiaturas and a free use of discord.

A mysterious slow introduction, expressive and full of daring harmonies, provides the atmosphere of the music to come. Even more daring are the harmonic clashes in the development section of the lively Allegro. The chromatic progressions and orchestral textures of these bars had a strong influence on both Beethoven and Schubert. The slow movement, Andante, is of an unusual length. The main theme in B-flat major resembles the romance from the Horn Concerto K.495, composed in the same year. In the central episode of this movement a dark C minor destroys the cantabile character of the exposition.

The finale, in rondo form, is full of surprises, both harmonically and textually. The range of technical devices is more and more broadened; there are specimens of canon, fugato, daring modulations and concerto-like scales and cadences. With these symphonic tendencies this sonata reaches a level in the genre of four-hand piano music not to be surpassed.

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Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

String Sextet no.2 in G major, Op.36

- I *Allegro non troppo*
- II *Scherzo (Allegro non troppo) and Trio (Presto giocoso)*
- III *Adagio*
- IV *Poco allegro*

On a visit to the town of Göttingen in 1858, the 25-year-old Johannes Brahms met Agathe von Siebold, the daughter of a university professor. He was attracted to this dark-haired intelligent girl with a beautiful singing voice, and wrote songs and duets for her; a year later he proposed to her, she accepted, and they exchanged rings. However, Brahms had as yet achieved little material or artistic success, and realised that, although he could cope on his own, it would not be fair to inflict his insecurities on a wife. So he wrote to Agathe, declaring 'I love you, I must see you again; but I cannot wear fetters...' Deeply hurt, Agathe returned his ring. Six years later, Brahms revisited Göttingen and found that Agathe had gone away (she was working as a governess in Ireland). Bitter memories were stirred, and Brahms poured his feelings into his String Sextet No. 2 in G, remarking to a friend, "here I have set myself free from my last love".

The Sextet was completed in 1865 and first performed in Zurich in November 1866. The first movement is pervaded by a repeated oscillating figure, perhaps signifying for Brahms the persistence of memory. It introduces a rising violin theme whose harmonic ambiguities convey a yearning sense of sadness and unattainability. Following a warm-hearted, song-like melody first heard on the cello, there is an impassioned outburst in which Brahms encodes the name of his lost beloved: in German notation, 'H' signifies B-natural, so with the notes A-G-A-B-E Brahms spells out the musical letters in the name 'AGA(T)HE'.

The second movement, though headed *Scherzo*, is hardly playful in character. Its gentle opening melody is based on a neo-baroque Gavotte for piano that Brahms had written as long ago as 1854 – perhaps another secret autobiographical reference. The contrastingly boisterous central *Trio* section is in a bouncing triple time with cross-rhythms.

The beautiful and restrained slow movement takes the form of a theme with five variations and a coda. The rising intervals of the theme relate it to the opening of the first movement: they contain the notes A-D-E, seen by some commentators as another coded message – the German word 'Ade', meaning 'farewell'.

The finale opens in a breathless scurry of semiquavers – their obsessive repetitions echoing the oscillating 'memory' figure from the first movement – and continues at a steady but relentless pace, as if Brahms does not dare to pause for reflection. Various elements from the previous movements reappear in disguise; only 'AGATHE' herself is no longer to be found.

Jonathan Burton © 2007

INTERVAL 15 MINUTES

There are toilets in the lobby at the back of the church, and downstairs via the stairs beside the stage. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be served downstairs *after* the concert.

George ENESCU (1881-1955)

Octet for Strings, Op.7

- I *Très modéré* –
- II *Très fougueux* –
- III *Lentement* –
- IV *Mouvement de valse bien rythmée*

Enescu was one of the great musical geniuses of the 20th century, yet he has never been embraced by the mainstream, his name and his music usually pushed towards the specialised margins. Perhaps his problem was to have excelled at too many things. As a performer he was one of the world's leading violinists (he was Menuhin's teacher and mentor) as well as being a useful pianist and cellist. At the same time, he was a renowned conductor, a famous teacher, and of course the greatest composer Romania has produced. Another issue may have been that he worked during a period of great musical upheaval, and while composers like Stravinsky and Schoenberg were radically changing the course of musical history, Enescu's brand of nationalist modernism suddenly found itself outdated.

In fact it is almost impossible to categorise Enescu's music, such was the richness and range of his output. In his early works such as this Octet (written when he was just 18), one can hear influences of the music he was surrounded by, such as Debussy, Wagner, Richard Strauss, Chausson and Franck, but his own thumbprints are already easy to hear, such as his individual approach to tonality and modality, and the integration of Romanian folk music into his language.

The Octet was an extremely ambitious project, in which Enescu set out to create a unique structure on a huge scale. The over-arching structure describes a basic sonata form, with the first movement acting as exposition, the middle two as development, and the finale as recapitulation and coda. And yet within this we still find each movement with its own cogent structure, almost like a set of Russian dolls. If this may sound complex, in fact the listening experience is surprisingly straightforward, thanks largely to the huge paragraphs of almost endless melody that comprise the work.

Scholars have broken down the melodic content into eight themes. The first six are introduced in the first movement, and while some are separated by a brief pause, others roll seamlessly into each other, almost like an endless Wagnerian melody, a kind of musical urban sprawl. Theme 7 identifies the start of the scherzo, a fast, angular motif with huge leaps punctuated by dramatic rests, in strong contrast to the largely singing themes of the first movement. Theme 8 gradually unfolds in the restful slow movement, building gradually to a searing climax before turning towards the finale.

It is in the finale that the real genius of Enescu reveals itself, as he reintroduces each theme one by one, transforming each of them into a kind of diabolic waltz. Not content with merely reminding us of the themes as melodies, he then interweaves them contrapuntally, themes becoming accompaniment figures or fugal subjects before re-emerging as melody. The music builds and builds until the triumphant return of the final 8th (slow movement) theme in the lower strings, muscling its way above the fighting fragments of earlier themes, which sweeps us towards the final climax.

The influence of Romanian folk music is never far away, and subtly reveals itself both melodically and harmonically in various ways. Some of the themes are clearly derived from the folk tradition, in particular those in the first movement, played by the first violin alone, that sound like a folk fiddler gently improvising. Within the themes, there are frequent modal inflections, such as flattened seconds and sevenths of the scale, that give a strong folky flavour, and these modal inflections also find their way into the harmonies.

The Octet is also notable for Enescu's idiosyncratic and distinctive orchestration: for example, a striking feature of the opening theme is that seven of the eight players all play it together, a monodic form of melody writing, while the eighth player provides a constant rhythmic propulsion in the bass. Both of these become important features of the work, that rhythmic propulsion taking many forms but rarely letting up, and the monody alternating with ever more complicated counterpoint to define the texture.

The overall sound of the work is rich and sumptuous, with gorgeous textures and soaring melodies. Not one to hold back in any way, Enescu explores extremes of every parameter, from delicate pianissimos to searing fortissimos, and moments of stillness to passages of dizzying speed (the climax of the second movement reaches a metronome mark of minim = 200 beats per minute!). But overall it is a deeply satisfying piece both to play and to listen to, a unique work by an underrated and special voice whose music deserves a wider audience.

@Simon Blendis

Do come and join us downstairs after the concert for tea or coffee.

Our next concert

Sunday 12th March 2023, 3.00 pm, at Seaford Baptist Church

We are privileged to welcome former BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists, and ECHO (European Concert Hall Organisation) Rising Stars, **the Amatis Trio**, playing works by Mozart, Shostakovich and Schubert.

Membership of Seaford Music Society, which grants you free entry to this season's concert series, can be purchased from our Treasurer, Paul Moore, in the foyer at the back of the church. The cost of your ticket for today's concert will be credited towards your membership subscription if you join now.

Additional benefits for members of Seaford Music Society

Receive a £3 discount on your ticket when attending Uckfield Music Club, Haywards Heath Music Society and Nicholas Yonge Society concerts. Simply produce your Seaford Music Society membership card when you pay at the door. Details of the concerts can be found on each organisation's website.

Uckfield Music Club (www.uckfieldmusicclub.uk): tickets £12 instead of £15 *subject to review*

Haywards Heath Music Society (www.haywardsheathmusicsociety.org.uk): tickets £12 instead of £15

Nicholas Yonge Society (www.nyslewes.org.uk): tickets £17 instead of £20