

Seaford Music Society

Sunday 12th May 2024 at 3.00 pm

The Berkeley Ensemble

Renate Sokolovska	<i>Flute</i>
John Slack	<i>Clarinet</i>
David Horwich	<i>Horn</i>
Sophie Mather, Francesca Barritt	<i>Violins</i>
Dan Shilladay	<i>Viola</i>
Gemma Wareham	<i>Cello</i>
Martin Ludenbach	<i>Double bass</i>
<i>with</i> Laura Snowden	<i>Guitar</i>

The Berkeley Ensemble was formed by friends in a spirit of adventure. 'An instinctive collective' (*The Strad*), its members have come together from diverse corners of musical life to make music in new ways, reach new audiences and, most importantly, explore new repertoire, be it newly written or inadvertently forgotten. Its acclaimed performances and recordings celebrate contemporary chamber music, especially by British composers. Since its founding in 2008 the ensemble has premiered over 40 works commissioned by or written for the group, from composers including Michael Berkeley, John Woolrich and Lynne Plowman. Its eight albums include 18 premiere recordings amongst a diverse catalogue ranging from Knussen to Beethoven, and have attracted considerable praise.

Away from the concert platform, the Berkeley Ensemble works tirelessly to foster the creation, appreciation and performance of chamber music at every age, level and ability. Recent highlights have included collaborations with both PRS for Music and Tŷ Cerdd on professional development schemes for composers. For amateur performers, the group runs a chamber course in Somerset, as well as a series of study days and courses in London.

Residencies and associations with schools allow the ensemble to help create and develop musical communities of lasting and ever-deepening value. The ensemble is particularly proud of its longstanding links with Ibstock Place School in Barnes and the David Ross Education Trust.

Hailed a 'string sensation' by *BBC Music Magazine*, British-French guitarist and composer **Laura Snowden** is acclaimed for her 'poise and intensity' (*Guardian*) and playing of 'extraordinary depth' (*Strings, Classical Music Magazine*). Laura studied with Julian Bream, during which time she gave two concerts at Wigmore Hall featuring premieres of his recent commissions. This led to international recognition and festival debuts across Europe, China and the US, as well as concerto debuts with Norrköping Symphony Orchestra and Münchener Kammerorchester, and a recording of Lisa Streich's guitar concerto *Augenlider* with the Deutsches Symphonie Orchester.

As a composer, Laura has had her music performed at the Royal Albert Hall, Wigmore Hall and Sadlers Wells, has been commissioned by the Park Lane Group, Birmingham Symphony Hall and International Guitar Foundation, and has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio Scotland and Hong Kong Radio 4.



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

Malcolm ARNOLD (1921-2006)

Fantasy for Cello, Op.130

- I *Andantino*
- II *Vivace*
- III *Lento*
- IV *Alla marcia*
- V *Allegretto*
- VI *Lento*
- VII *Andantino*

Phantasy for String Quartet, 'Vita Abundans'

Andante con moto – Andante – Presto – Andante con moto

Arnold's Fantasy for Cello dates from 1986, by which time his early successes and reputation had been dulled by changes in fashion as well as an increasingly difficult personal life. It was commissioned by Julian Lloyd Webber, and would become the last in an occasional sequence of twelve fantasies for solo instruments by the composer. Unlike the quartet, which plays without a break, it is formed of seven discrete movements. The opening and closing sections are very similar, but, in between, faster material – a clichéd accompaniment in search of a tune, a brittle march and a hypnotically looping plucked allegretto – alternates with slow music of great emotional depth and pathos.

The Fantasy – or phantasy – was a musical form closely associated with Walter Willson Cobbett, an early twentieth-century English business magnate and amateur violinist. He first encountered the viol fantasias of Lawes, Locke, Purcell and others at the popular Gresham College lectures given by Frederic Bridge from 1890 and saw in them a fresher, more succinct approach to chamber music that could serve to complement the cerebral, often long multi-movement sonatas of contemporary concert programmes.

Renaissance and early Baroque fantasias were short and through-composed, often alternating faster and slower sections and intended for domestic music making as described by one of their most famous devotees, Samuel Pepys. Cobbett encouraged contemporary composers to write modern-day fantasias through a series of competitions and commissions, and funded a composers' prize at the Royal College of Music which survived through much of the twentieth century. Arnold's Phantasy 'Vita Abundans' was entered for the RCM competition in 1941. Although written hurriedly in a matter of days, the piece – Arnold's first of three for quartet – was awarded second prize. At the time, the string quartet medium was still regarded as the acme of high art, and it was a brave quartet composer indeed who drew on such popular idioms as tango and blues so explicitly. The outer sections make much of these daring allusions, framing a faster central section that also pulls much incongruous material into its whirlwind progress.

Tim Watts (b.1979)

Lullabies

The Berkeley Ensemble commissioned Tim Watts to write a companion piece for Malcolm Arnold's Guitar Concerto especially for a performance at the ensemble's own Little Venice Music Festival in 2018. Then, as now, Laura Snowden was the soloist and the Ensemble is hugely grateful to both her and Seaford Music Society for the opportunity to revisit this haunting piece. The composer writes:

Initially, the guitar appears to be a reluctant soloist. It seeks instead to embed itself in the ensemble or to accompany others. When they leave it exposed, it trails off into silence, the only instrument here whose notes cannot sustain, beginning to die away as soon as plucked. Only gradually does it begin to forget that it 'can't' sing...

Its song is, perhaps, trying to soothe away an uneasiness that keeps manifesting itself in jittery chords and scurrying figures in the strings, which eventually worm their way into the guitar's music, too. It is this 'insomniac' element that may have suggested the title's plural: one lullaby won't do the trick here. Sleep – if and when it comes – is initiated by the viola, cradled by the guitar's rocking motion, and almost certainly owes something to J S Bach.

INTERVAL 15 MINUTES

There are toilets in the lobby at the back of the church, and downstairs via the stairs beside the stage. **No refreshments will be served during the interval, but we warmly invite you to join us downstairs for tea, coffee and biscuits after the concert ends.**

Modest MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881)

Pictures at an Exhibition (*selection*)

Promenade

Limoges, the Market

Catacombs – With the Dead in a Dead Language

The Hut on Hen's Legs (Baba Yaga)

The Bogatyr Gates (In the Capital in Kiev)

Mussorgsky probably met the artist and architect Viktor Hartmann at the home of Vladimir Stasov, the influential critic of art and music. Both men stood at the vanguard of the nationalist school of intrinsically Russian art and quickly bonded over their shared ideals. Hartmann's death in 1873 aged just 39 shook the composer and wider artistic world profoundly; an exhibition was hurriedly mounted the following spring of some 400 of his works in St Petersburg. Mussorgsky attended, having loaned it two pictures that Hartmann had previously given him as a gift.

Still mourning his friend, in June 1874 Mussorgsky broke off work on other projects to write *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The composer worked quickly, finishing the piece in just three weeks. Mussorgsky wrote to Stasov, "*Hartmann is boiling as Boris [Godunov, the opera] boiled—sounds and ideas hung in the air, I am gulping and overeating, and can barely manage to scribble them on paper.*"

Mussorgsky always intended the work to be published, but it didn't appear in print until 1886, five years after his death, edited – with alarming interventions – by his close friend and colleague Rimsky Korsakov. Although conceived as a work for piano, today it is known primarily in Maurice Ravel's 1922 orchestration, although this was the third such arrangement, after those by Mikhail Tushmalov and Henry Wood. Wood suppressed his own version in deference to Ravel's masterful transcription, but, although popular, Ravel's work has not discouraged many subsequent arrangements, from those for orchestra to others for electronics and even thrash metal band.

Underneath its programmatic exterior, *Pictures* is a tightly organised piece falling into two halves. The first is more objectively illustrative, the pictures and the interlinking promenades remaining musically discrete. The second half, performed today, begins with a restatement of the opening promenade nearly in full, before it vanishes as a linking idea and its theme begins to infuse the final four pictures at a much deeper level.

This process begins with the second half of *Catacombs*, which the composer cryptically headed *Cum mortuis in lingua mortua* ('With the Dead in a Dead Language'). Here, the viewer's objective viewpoint changes to something much more subjective as the promenade theme enters the eerie, suspended atmosphere of the catacombs and the viewer becomes lost in the picture. For Mussorgsky, still grieving the loss of his friend and fellow artist, Hartmann's self-portrait in the Paris Catacombs must have struck him as prescient: in the margin of his score he wrote, "Well may it be in Latin! The creative spirit of the dead Hartmann leads me towards the skulls, invokes them; the skulls begin to glow softly."

The promenade hovers behind the famous finale, 'The Bogatyr Gates', too. Here it is transformed into the triumphant main theme and alternated with a solemn Russian orthodox hymn before an extended coda rounds off the piece in a triumphant blaze of sound.

Malcolm ARNOLD (1921-2006)

Guitar Concerto, Op.67

- I *Allegro*
- II *Lento – Vivace – Lento*
- III *Allegro con brio*

Arnold's Guitar Concerto begins audaciously – or cheekily? – with plucked chords from the accompanying ensemble. Balancing the relatively quiet and quickly fading sounds of a guitar against its accompaniment in a concerto is famously difficult, but Arnold seems to thumb his nose at the problem by deliberately blurring the lines between the two. Premiered at Britten's Aldeburgh Festival in 1959 by the Melos Ensemble and Julian Bream, Arnold found an elegant solution to the problem of balance by fielding a transparent chamber ensemble of eight players rather than a full orchestra (although later performances have sometimes used sections of strings rather the soloists).

The heart of the piece is its central slow movement, a blues elegy for the jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt, who had died in 1953 and whose playing was a major influence on both Arnold and Bream. Both were jazz fans and would sometimes play together for fun, Arnold accompanying Bream on the decidedly un-jazzy clavichord.

The outer movements are more overtly classical in structure and detail, the first being cast in a traditional sonata allegro and the finale a rondo. Despite the rigour, both are crowded with Arnold's signature of maddeningly memorable melodies that echo in one's memory long after the concert is over.

The Berkeley Ensemble would like to thank the Malcolm Arnold Trust for their generous support of this concert.

Do come and join us downstairs for tea, coffee and biscuits after the concert!

Our next season of concerts

This is the final concert of our current season. The first concert in the 2024-25 season will be on **Sunday 20th October 2024**, so put the date in your diary now! Details of all the concerts next season will be given to Members attending the Annual General Meeting (date to be advised) and will be circulated to all other Members immediately afterwards.

If you are not already a member, and would like to receive details of next season's concerts when they are published, please leave your details with Paul Moore, at the desk in the foyer at the back of the church.

Additional benefits for members of Seaford Music Society

As a Member, you can receive a £3 discount on your ticket (£15 instead of £18) when attending Uckfield Music Club concerts. Simply produce your Seaford Music Society membership card when you pay at the door. Details of the concerts can be found on the Club's website, www.uckfieldmusicclub.uk.

It is expected that this arrangement will also continue to apply to Haywards Heath Music Society and Nicholas Yonge Society concerts when they resume in the autumn.