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NOTOS QUARTET

Thursday 17 October, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

Piano Quartet in G minor, K478

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Transfigured Night, Op. 4 (arrangement for piano quartet by C. Schickedanz)

Arnold Schoenberg

Interval

Piano Quartet in C minor, Op.13

Richard Strauss

Please ensure all mobile phones are switched off. Photographs and videos of the performance are not permitted.

There is a Sennheiser Infrared enhanced hearing system in the Djanogly Recital Hall; please request a headset from our front-of-house staff to enhance your enjoyment of this evening's concert.



CAVATINA
Chamber Music Trust

PROGRAMME NOTES

Piano Quartet in G minor, K478

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-91)

Allegro

Andante

Rondo. Allegro moderato

According to Constanze Mozart's second husband, Georg Nikolaus Nissen, whose unfinished biography of the composer was published after his death, Mozart was commissioned to write three piano quartets by the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister. He completed the G minor Quartet, K478, in 1785, but it was found too difficult, for both audiences and musicians, and Hoffmeister allowed Mozart to keep the advance on his fee on condition that he did not write the other two.

The story may or may not be true; but there is no doubt that with the G minor Quartet Mozart created something unprecedented in the field of chamber music with a keyboard instrument. Previously this had been treated as primarily a medium for domestic, amateur music-making, with the keyboard part having the main musical interest and any other instruments providing an accompaniment. But at the end of the 1770s Mozart produced a number of sonatas for keyboard and violin (convention purposely listed the instruments that way round) in which he began tilting the balance towards a more equal partnership between the two; the development continues in his two piano quartets.

Hoffmeister's string-playing customers, used to a simple accompanying role, were no doubt unprepared for parts as taxing as these. Mozart went ahead with his second quartet – in E flat, K493 – anyway, dating it in his own catalogue 3 June 1786. Hoffmeister got as far as engraving the violin part before abandoning the project, and the Quartet was eventually accepted by another publisher.

In the case of the G minor Quartet, players would also have been startled by the music's expressive demands. Right from the start it is clear that the first movement is going to be a stormy, passionate affair. The stern unison opening figure dominates the entire movement. Even when not stated in full it can be sensed in the background, with just the first two notes being enough of a reminder. So when it comes back with redoubled force to signal the return of the opening music, it is with a feeling not so much of surprise as of an expected culmination. The coda ends the movement in a mood of vehement defiance.

The B flat *Andante* is the perfect answer to the first movement's turbulence. The serenity of its many gently falling phrases seems to have a profoundly healing quality, which enables Mozart to move convincingly to the lively G major finale. Even here, there are subtly poignant touches in small melodic details which keep superficial jollity at bay. This is particularly the case in a central passage where the music is clouded by minor keys and a stormy moment that recalls the first movement – in spirit, rather than by quoting actual material. A sequence of trills on the piano heralds the last return of the rondo theme, after which the music lurches unexpectedly into E flat before gliding, as though nothing had happened, back to the key it should be in, ready for the final bars.

***Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night), Op 4
Transcribed for piano quartet by Christoph Schickedanz**

**Arnold Schoenberg
(1874-1951)**

Verklärte Nacht brings together innovation and tradition. It takes the narrative tone-poem developed by Liszt and Strauss, and Wagner's chromatic language, and his techniques of thematic transformation, and it brings them into the chamber music tradition determinedly upheld by Brahms. The degree of opposition between these two strands in late 19th-century German music may have been exaggerated, both at the time and since, but *Verklärte Nacht* remains a remarkable act of synthesis.

Written in 1899, and scored originally for string sextet, it takes as its starting-point a poem by Richard Dehmel (1863-1920) – who seems to have been a favourite poet of Schoenberg's at the time – following not only its story-line but also its structure. Three short stanzas describe a man and woman walking through the forest on a cold, moonlit night. In the two longer ones, in between, the woman confesses that she is carrying another man's child, and describes her feelings of guilt, then we hear the man's warm, reassuring reply that their love will make the child their own.

So the music falls into two large sections, with a short introduction, linking passage and coda. The steadily-paced opening, sombre but with glints of light breaking through, sets the scene for the impassioned, agitated D minor music which follows. As this comes to rest a short transition brings about a magical change to D major for the first cello's consoling new theme. The final section transforms the work's opening theme, glistening high on the first violin in a passage of breathtaking radiance and delicacy.

Schoenberg's style advanced at an astonishing rate at this early stage in his career. Only two years earlier, he had produced his D major String Quartet, which even recalls Dvořák in places. But when Schoenberg's teacher, Alexander Zemlinsky, sent the score of *Verklärte Nacht* to the concert organisation the Vienna Tonkünstlerverein in the hope of securing a performance, the judges were clearly disturbed by its daring harmonic style. "It sounds as if someone had smeared the score of *Tristan* while it was still wet", was one comment. They rejected the work, ostensibly on the grounds of one specific chord which they were unable to classify. But Schoenberg would be impelled, reluctantly but irresistibly, deeper into unknown territory in the years to come. His explorations were to have far-reaching consequences for twentieth-century music.

This transcription, by German violinist and teacher Christoph Schickedanz, was first performed in September 2022, in the Chamber Music Hall of Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie concert hall.

Verklärte Nacht

Zwei Menschen gehn durch kahlen, kalten
Hain;
der Mond läuft mit, sie schau'n hinein.
Der Mond läuft über hohe Eichen,
kein Wölkchen trübt das Himmelslicht,
in das die schwarzen Zacken reichen.
Die Stimme eines Weibes spricht:

Ich trag ein Kind, und nit von dir,
ich geh in Sünde neben dir.
Ich hab mich schwer an mir vergangen;
ich glaubte nicht mehr an ein Glück
und hatte doch ein schwer Verlangen

Transfigured Night

Two people are walking through a bare, cold
forest; the moon moves with them, and they
gaze at it.
The moon moves over the tall oak trees,
no clouds obscure the light in the sky,
into which the black points reach up.
A woman's voice speaks:

"I'm carrying a child, but it's not yours,
I'm walking in sin beside you.
I have seriously wronged myself;
I'd lost faith in happiness,
but I still yearned

nach Lebensfrucht, nach Mutterglück
und Pflicht – da hab ich mich erfrecht,
da ließ ich schauernd mein Geschlecht
von einem fremden Mann umfassen
und hab mich noch dafür gesegnet.
Nun hat das Leben sich gerächt,
nun bin ich dir, o dir begegnet.

Sie geht mit ungelenktem Schritt,
sie schaut empor, der Mond läuft mit;
ihr dunkler Blick ertrinkt in Licht.
Die Stimme eines Mannes spricht:

Das Kind, das du empfangen hast,
sei deiner Seele keine Last,
o sieh, wie klar das Weltall schimmert!
Es ist ein Glanz um Alles her,
du treibst mit mir auf kaltem Meer,
doch eine eigne Wärme flimmert
von dir in mich, von mir in dich;
die wird das fremde Kind verklären,
du wirst es mir, von mir gebären,
du hast den Glanz in mich gebracht,
du hast mich selbst zum Kind gemacht.

Er faßt sie um die starken Hüften,
ihr Atem mischt sich in den Lüften,
zwei Menschen gehn durch hohe, helle Nacht.

Richard Dehmel (1863-1920)

for life's fullness, in the happiness and duties of
motherhood – so I dared
to offer my sex, with a shudder,
to a stranger's embrace
and even thought I was blessed by it.
Now life has had its revenge,
now I have met you – you."

She walks on with awkward steps,
she looks up; the moon moves with her;
her dark gaze is drowned in light.
A man's voice speaks:

"The child you are carrying –
do not let it burden your soul;
Look how brightly the universe shimmers!
It shines all around.
You are voyaging with me over a cold sea,
but a special warmth flickers
from you in me, and from me in you;
it will transfigure the stranger's child,
you bear it for me, from me.
you have brought the light down on me,
you yourself have made the child mine."

He holds her by her strong hips;
Their breath mingles in the air.
Two people are walking through the high,
bright night.

Piano Quartet in C minor, Op.13

Richard Strauss
(1864-47)

Allegro
Scherzo. Presto
Andante
Finale. Vivace

Strauss burst onto the scene with his early orchestral tone poems – in particular *Don Juan* (1888) – which announced the arrival of a startling new talent, drawing on the musical narrative techniques developed by Liszt and Wagner. But behind this achievement was an apprenticeship that gave him a solid grounding in the more conservative traditions of Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, thanks to his horn-playing (and Wagner-hating) father, Franz, and Franz's colleagues in the Munich Court Orchestra. All of his major chamber works date from these early years, apart from the single-movement string sextet that is the introduction to his final opera, *Capriccio*, but which has also taken on an independent life as a concert work.

He composed his Piano Quartet during 1884, completing it on New Year's Day 1885. He was the pianist at the first performance, in Weimar on 8 December 1885, and again a month later in a performance in Meiningen. Strauss dedicated it "in respect and gratitude", to the Grand Duke of

Meiningen, who employed him as the conductor of his court orchestra. The Quartet later won first prize in a competition organised by the Berlin Tonkünstlerverein (Composers' Guild).

While it may not be instantly recognisable as Strauss's work, its combination of exuberant energy and bold confidence in handling large-scale structures are exactly the qualities that were to grab the wider musical world's attention just a few years later. And occasionally we catch fleeting glimpses of the mature musical personality about to emerge.

The first movement's brief, quiet introduction presents a short phrase that will become important in the main body of the movement, but gives no hint of the sheer torrent that bursts out just seconds later. The second main theme is a broad, expansive tune for the three strings in octaves over ebullient arpeggio figures on the piano. The music swings between these two impulses, the impetuous and the lyrical, with an even more headlong rush in the last few bars.

The Scherzo is swift, airy and, at first, rhythmically elusive. Throughout, the strings make great play with a snappy three-note figure beginning with an octave drop. The slower central section is calmer and more song-like, coming gently to rest before being overtaken by the faster music again. Eventually a glance back at the central section suggests a quiet ending, but the final bars put paid to that idea.

Song-like tranquillity takes over in the third movement, with moments of great charm and delicacy, and a more flowing central section.

The finale returns to the vigour of the first movement, but there is room, also, for a broad, expressive theme for the strings, led by the cello, over a gently syncopated piano accompaniment. The music's nimble, quicksilver energy is never far away, though, building an irresistible sense of exhilaration as it races to its conclusion.

Notes and translation © Mike Wheeler, 2024

NOTOS QUARTET

Sindri Lederer – Violin
Andrea Burger – Viola
Benjamin Lai – Cello
Antonia Köster – Piano

Audiences and critics alike have lauded the Notos Quartet for its virtuosic brilliance and technical perfection, as well as its sense of balance and interplay, allowing the musicians to "touch the listener's heart with their intimately played notes."

Since its inception in 2007, the four musicians have garnered six first and many special prizes at international competitions in Holland, Italy, England and China, establishing themselves on a global stage. The quartet performs in renowned European concert halls such as the Philharmonie Cologne, the Berlin Philharmonie, the Konzerthaus Berlin, the Konzerthaus Vienna, the Wigmore Hall London, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Tonhalle Zurich, the BOZAR Brussels and the Teatro la Fenice Venice. Their performances also take them to distant destinations such as Australia, the USA, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. In 2022, the Notos Quartet was honored with the Jeunesses Musicales' prestigious Würth Prize.

In addition to interpreting well-known masterpieces, the quartet regularly commissions and premieres new piano quartets. The musicians' equal dedication to lost and forgotten works of the piano quartet genre and their commitment to presenting these to a wider audience is reflected in their CD recordings.

Their debut CD "Hungarian Treasures", released by Sony Classical/RCA in February 2017, includes the world premiere recording of Béla Bartók's piano quartet and was met with worldwide praise. The second album, "Brahms - The Schönberg Effect", released again by SONY Classical, is dedicated entirely to Johannes Brahms and combines his famous Piano Quartet in g minor with a transcription of his 3rd Symphony, arranged especially for the Notos Quartet by Andreas N. Tarkmann.

In their latest album "Paris Bar," released on March 25, 2022, the Notos Quartet unveils yet another world premiere recording: the piano quartet by Hungarian composer László Lajtha. Lajtha, often mentioned alongside Bartók and Kodály as one of the "les trois grands hongrois" (the three great Hungarians), regrettably did not receive the recognition he deserved due to political oppression.

The artists' social commitment is reflected in their promotion of young musicians - another important aspect of the quartet's work. The ensemble has held a teaching position at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, led the Saigon Chamber Music Masterclass in Vietnam and, in autumn 2015, initiated the Notos Chamber Music Academy, which has been held in Weikersheim since 2019 in collaboration with Jeunesses Musicales Germany.