

Total performance time: approximately 120 minutes, including an interval of 20 minutes

Ensemble 360

Ensemble 360:

Benjamin Nabarro violin

Lucy Gould violin

Gemma Rosefield cello

Rachel Roberts viola

Enno Senft double bass

Amy Yule flute

Adrian Wilson oboe

Robert Plane clarinet

Naomi Atherton horn

Emily Hultmark bassoon

Tim Horton piano

Frank Bridge (1879–1941)

Phantasy Piano Quartet in F sharp minor
(1910) 12'

*Andante con moto – Allegro vivace –
Andante con moto*

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Piano Quintet in A, D.667, 'The Trout' (1819) 37'

i. Allegro vivace

ii. Andante

iii. Scherzo: presto – Trio

iv. Thema: andantino –

Variazioni: allegretto

v. Finale: allegro giusto

Witold Lutosławski (1913–1994)

Dance Preludes (1954, rev. 1959) 9'

i. Allegro molto

ii. Andantino

iii. Allegro giocoso

iv. Andante

v. Allegro molto

Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959)

Nonet (1959) 17'

i. Poco allegro

ii. Andante

iii. Allegretto

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

Sinfonietta, Op.1 (1932) 15'

i. Poco presto ed agitato

ii. Variations, andante lento

iii. Tarantella

INTERVAL

From its origins in the 17th century, chamber music has had a fascinating evolution. The term initially meant, simply, music performed privately (rather than in a theatre or in church), and could be for a group of – within reason – any size. In the 18th century it largely took the form of the string quartet, championed by Mozart and Haydn. Mendelssohn and Schubert then took the reins and sometimes expanded the form: the former doubling up to write his famous Octet, the latter adding other instruments including, in his 1819 'Trout' quintet, the double bass. From the 20th century onwards, it became the ideal form with which to experiment, ushering in an era of more diverse ensembles (vividly demonstrated in this programme). What has been consistent throughout, however, is an intimate performing experience, often described as a 'conversation' (or even 'argument'). Historian W. Dean Sutcliffe has pointed out that it is a strange idea of a conversation, with everyone speaking at the same time; yet the interplay between musicians certainly suggests conversation with its playful digressions, variations on a theme, and occasional forays into darker territory.

Bridge's chamber works from the early 20th century were strongly influenced by the late Romantic German composers, such as Brahms, and have a dramatic, uninhibited quality. His 1910 *Phantasy* is a prime example: straightaway, listeners are plunged into a turbulent atmosphere, then treated to a melancholy passage for solo piano which is taken up by the rest of the group. Entirely comfortable in the genre by this stage, Bridge skilfully travels between intense 'building' sequences, and luxuriously expressive passages that give the lie to any idea that British composers can't show passion (there is a glorious example at around the nine minute mark). The appearance of the major key at the end is a moment of sublime release.

A 1969 television documentary entitled *The Trout* follows the rehearsals and complete performance of **Schubert's** famous quintet by an astonishing ensemble of musicians, including the very young Jacqueline du Pré, Pinchas Zukerman, and Daniel Barenboim. The film follows the light-hearted, sometimes uproarious rehearsals, leading to a performance of fierce, collective intensity. Schubert's 'Trout' quintet certainly requires this level of spirited cooperation and absolute concentration over its 35-minute running time. The unusual instrumentation – only one violin, and the inclusion of the double bass – was based on a similar quintet composed by Schubert's fellow composer Hummel. The two low string instruments effectively free the piano to roam higher up the keyboard than usual, and the pianist has some highly virtuosic passages to contend with. The title comes from Schubert's song, 'Die Forelle' (the trout), with its distinctive 'leaping' sextuplets in the piano part – similar figures appear across the whole work, and the fourth movement is a set of variations on the song itself. The first movement is the most substantial, opening in a stately manner, then developing into witty interplay

between all five parts. A serene Andante follows, with the sextuplets falling rather than rising. After a brisk Scherzo, the 'Trout' variations begin – teasingly withholding the 'leaping' motif until later in the movement. The finale does not have the 'race for the finish line' quality of some final movements, but is – for the most part – elegant and dance-like, though the sudden twists into the minor key may take the listeners by surprise.

The rest of the works in this programme were written in the 20th century, brilliantly exemplifying the changing landscape of chamber ensembles. **Lutosławski's** *Dance Preludes*, initially composed in 1954, are for solo clarinet accompanied by strings, harp, piano and percussion (originally just piano). The dance melodies are based on folksongs from northern Poland, and the sprightly, playful style of 1, 3 and 5 belies the fact that they were composed at the end of a dark and difficult period of Lutosławski's life (under the Stalinist regime). The slow-moving, enigmatic No.4, somewhat Shostakovich-like in tone, suggests something more disquieting. But for the most part, the characteristically irregular Eastern European folk rhythms give the group an infectious energy.

Equally as lively is **Martinů's** Nonet, perhaps surprisingly so given the composer was terminally ill at the time of its composition (he wrote it in Switzerland in January 1959 and died only eight months later). The first movement is outdoorsy and optimistic, with a pristine, 'neoclassical' quality, very much influenced by Stravinsky. It is followed by a sensuous Andante, then a swinging, dance-like finale. Running like a thread through the whole piece are allusions to folksongs from Czechoslovakia, a country he had left in 1923. His biographers have noted that his final works display a wistful longing for his native land – that they are 'the music of home'.

Britten adopts the same instrumentation as Martinů for his Op.1, the *Sinfonietta*, composed in 1932 when he was 18 years old. Again like the Martinů, it has a beautiful, ruminative, and occasionally dark, slow movement sandwiched between more turbulent outer sections, and also suggests the influence of Stravinsky in its stripped-back texture. The music as a whole is a fascinating blend of the recent past and what would become Britten's future: passages of almost stereotypically 'English' rhapsodic music (not unlike the Bridge *Phantasy*) alternating with a sparse, improvisatory style as well as brilliant writing for the French horn. The latter elements would increasingly find their way into his ensemble writing in the years to come.

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