Levon Chilingirian: Bartók and Beethoven String Quartets

An enticing new series begins this season on 8 November: the Chilingirian Quartet will be playing six programmes juxtaposing the six Bartók string quartets with the six Beethoven Opus 18 string quartets. Each concert will also include a work by Mozart.

Why the Beethoven and Bartók theme? Recently, Levon Chilingirian, a founder of the Quartet that bears his name and President of the London Chamber Music Society, kindly agreed to answer some of my queries about the series, which will run through to 2017.

"Beethoven and Bartók are towering presences in the string-quartet repertoire. They each define the inner soul of the composer throughout their mature years. They share an energy and concentration coupled with a fearless stretching of traditional boundaries. In this series, marking the 70th anniversary of Bartók's death, we are commemorating the first complete cycle of the Bartók quartets, which was performed in Conway Hall in 1949-1950, when each was twinned with one of the Opus 18 Beethoven quartets."

I love the echoes of folk and traditional melodies in this repertoire. Levon "can hear folk music with its characteristic rhythms throughout these quartets. There is a contrast in flavour between the more Germanic Beethoven and the eclectic Bartók, who notated the songs and dances of all nations surrounding Hungary, as well as North Africa! Both composers develop the material masterfully within their own distinct styles. Bartók sounds more overtly bucolic but he is also the master of burlesque!"

I wondered about Beethoven's impact on Bartók's composition, and of course "no composer writing quartets after Beethoven's Opus 18s were published in 1801 could escape his enormous influence! Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms (who destroyed many quartets before publishing his Opus 51) as well as Bartók must have been in awe of Beethoven's output."

As for the structure of the quartets, "Beethoven stuck to the four-movement structure throughout his Opus 18s, although he was itching to experiment with the wonderful Adagio (*La Malinconia*), casting a forward-looking dark shadow over the Allegretto Finale of the Sixth. Bartók was much more adventurous with his movement numbers and the order in which they were set. The Third Quartet has two main sections (slow/fast) whereas the Fifth has five (fast/slow/fast/slow/fast). It is only in his valedictory Sixth that he adopts the four-movement pattern.

"The Opus 18 quartets pose many technical challenges, particularly for the first violin, who is often playing exposed virtuoso passages That said, the

contrapuntal nature of Beethoven's writing brings in all four players with many solos as well as demanding ensemble work. The cello has many dramatic as well as humorous episodes, and the second violin and viola often combine to give added strength to the middle voices. Beethoven is asking each of the four players to play even more athletic music than either Haydn or Mozart!"

Even when music is not strictly programmatic, influences such as love, loss, money and travel, as well as inspiration can contribute to a composition. Levon commented: "The slow movement in Beethoven's Opus 18 No. 1 is a depiction of the parting of the two lovers in the vault scene of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. An interesting footnote to his Third Opus 18 Quartet is that he had copied out the entire Finale of Mozart's K464 in his sketchbook. The whole of this quartet pays homage to Mozart!

"The two World Wars were very much central to the moods of Bartók's Second (1915-17) and Sixth (1939) Quartets. The desperate mood of the Finale of No. 2 seems to continue in the sad (*Mesto*) theme which dominates the Sixth.

"There is also a musical answer to all his critics just before the end of his toughest and most uncompromising Fifth! In a fast and furious frenzy there is an incredibly loud return of the first movement theme in an almost orchestral texture. Suddenly after a silence, Bartók inserts the simplest little folk melody in the second violin with a hurdy-gurdy accompaniment, followed by a deliberately out-of-tune response from the first! Just as we think he is about to resolve into an angelic cadence (to please his challenged listeners), the fast and loud music interrupts and takes us to the end!"

I perhaps rather unfairly asked Levon if he had a 'favourite piece' to play: "I have lived with these pieces for over 40 years and consider them treasures of our rich repertoire. If I had to choose one piece out of the 12, it would be Bartók's Fifth. I still get excited by just opening the pages of this utterly original masterpiece!"

The first concert in this series, which will run for two years, will include Beethoven's Quartet No. 5 in A, Opus 18, and Bartók's Quartet No. 1, Opus 7. The concert will be preceded at 5.15pm by a talk on Bartók's first string quartet, when we are delighted to welcome Amanda Bayley, Professor of Music at Bath Spa University, as our eminent guest speaker. The pre-concert talk is, as usual, free for concert ticket holders. We hope you can join us for the start of what promises to be a memorable series.

Chris Bradshaw

Fine Arts Quartet – An Intense Beauty

LCMS is delighted that the Fine Arts Quartet will be returning to perform for us on 22 November 2015. The Quartet has been called the "The Dream Team" and "one of the gold-plated names in chamber music".

The American first violinist Ralph Evans was a prize-winner in the International Tchaikovsky Competition. Russian second violinist Efim Boico was chosen by Daniel Barenboim to be concertmaster of the Orchestre de Paris; the Canadian violist Juan-Miguel Hernandez recorded with Norah Jones and Chick Corea; and the British cellist Robert Cohen, in the words of 'New York Stereo Review', "plays like a God".

Despite their diversity and the individual impact each musician has had on the world of music, they have an instantly identifiable sound, an intense beauty, a deeply warming, fluent communication that envelopes their audience. It has been called a sound from the golden era, a sound that restores and enriches.

The Quartet holds an extraordinary and legendary history. Founded in Chicago in 1946, they have made over 200 recordings and toured throughout the world. The 32-year membership of Evans and Boico has created a unity of violin sound like no other. Three years ago, Cohen brought his extraordinary musical passion to the Quartet, followed shortly by Hernandez with his dynamism and heartfelt warmth.

For their concert on 22 November, the Fine Arts Quartet will bring the world's leading bayan-accordion player, Friedrich Lips, for the UK premiere of Efrem Podgaits' '*Ex animo*' quintet, written for and dedicated to Lips and the Fine Arts Quartet in 2003. This fantastic work is the first quintet written for the combination of bayan and string quartet. The concert opens with Haydn's scintillating Quartet Op. 77 No.1 and ends with the monumental 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet by Schubert.

Hilda Woolf

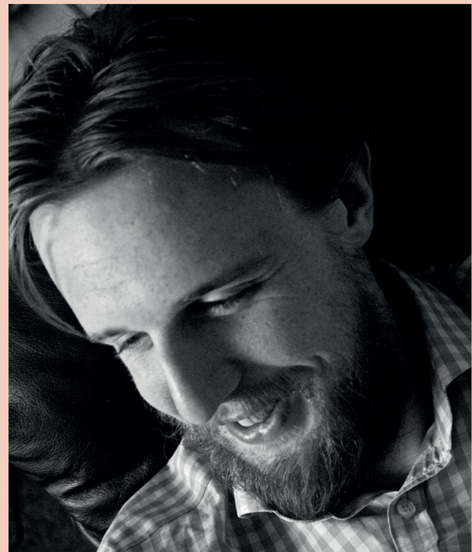
A personal note

My first experience of Kings Place was in 2009, when I gave a cello recital for LCMS. I fell in love with the beautiful acoustic and the very special atmosphere of the hall and the stunning building as a whole. Another visit, in May 2014, re-confirmed my feelings. One of the qualities I am particularly amazed by, especially given the location, is the feel of the silence in the hall. It's not the 'dead' silence that I commonly find in heavily soundproofed modern halls, but the peaceful, natural silence of a country village church. Placing sound, music, into that silence feels so comfortable and spacious -- the physical confines of the room seem to disappear. It's a space that inspires my musical expression and communication.

Kings Place is the coolest venue around and a lively artistic space. For me, there's an additional bonus: it's close to my home in North London and a great place to meet up with my lovely friends! So of course I'm extremely happy to be performing again with the Fine Arts Quartet at Kings Place in November.

Robert Cohen

Friends' Voices
The Superiority of Music



I have a very vague, half-memory of some Schopenhauer that I was reading for an essay during my student days. I'm paraphrasing here because I can't find the reference, but in the excerpt Schopenhauer made what seemed to me to be a very convincing argument for the superiority of music as an art form over all others.

Schopenhauer's points were essentially: when an artist paints, or a sculptor sculpts, or a writer writes, what you're left with is an icon or a mere representation of the original subject or the original emotion: the sculptor's sculpture is lesser than the object it is trying to depict, so it is with a painting. Literature and poetry come closer to perfection, but rely on the reader's ability to understand the writer's language first. Music, in Schopenhauer's opinion, is something more intangible, but it is precisely this intangibility that makes it more real. It is a distillation of emotion that requires no prior knowledge of how it is constructed for an audience to understand what the composer wishes to get across. To take a very well-known example: if you were to play Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata to somebody who had never before heard a piece of classical music, they would instinctively know that it was a melancholic piece of music; if you were to read a poem by Ben Jonson to somebody who doesn't speak English, they wouldn't have a clue what you were talking about.

It seems to me that music is the only art form which is truly alive: physical art forms like sculpture, or painting or photography freeze time. Reading is generally a quiet, private pursuit. The common thread linking these art forms (besides music) is that when their creator completes them, the work is completed; once a book is written, it is written. Once a piece of music is written however, it is only half-done. The composer needs to find musicians who will play it. Of course, there are fashions in performance as there are in composition, but each different musician will have completely different ideas about how to approach it; indeed a performer may feel differently about the same piece on any given day.

As I write this, I am listening to a recording of the Beaux Arts Trio (joined by Samuel Rhodes and Dolf Betelheim) playing Schumann's Piano Quintet. We have recently heard this same piece at LCMS concerts by the Chilingirian Quartet and John York, and Olga Vinokur with the Martinů Quartet. All three versions are/were recognisably the music that Schumann wrote, but because music is a living, constantly changing thing, none of them sounds alike. We can also hear – live – music that was conceived centuries ago; it is constantly being re-evaluated by different performers, different instruments, and it can take on new meaning as performances are informed by contemporary events. Think of the difference between the vastness of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony played annually in Japan and President Ivo Josipovi 's tinkling of the Ode to Joy theme when Croatia joined the European Union

I am consciously trying to keep autobiography to a minimum because I believe mine to be far less interesting than our previous contributors'. Since moving to London in 2009 I have graduated University, tried my hand at various jobs, and become engaged (all fairly common things, but of tremendous importance to me). One of the constants in my life these past few years has been the London Chamber Music Society concerts. They were a boon at University as they gave me the opportunity to hear the music I was studying. It was an LCMS concert that first enabled me to appreciate the music of Messiaen, for example; and they are important to me now as they are a wonderful example of things which rarely come together so well: the concerts provide an unrivalled sense of community, combined with the highest standards of music performance, at an affordable price. It is a genuine pleasure to be able to go somewhere every week, sit amongst friends, and watch and listen as music is transformed from base dots on a page into something transcendent.

Rob Edgar

Books

'Sleeping in Temples' by Susan Tomes. Boydell Press.

Photo: Robert Philip

I don't usually 'judge a book by its cover' but in this case the cover is a lovely place to start: a reflection? an artwork? water and oil? batik? I'm still not sure what it is, but it's beautiful and credited as a photograph by the author, the pianist Susan Tomes.

Initially unsure whether the book would be a group of lectures, anecdotes or theories, I ended up feeling I had had a few wonderful conversations, full of humour and insight, a very rewarding read. I should have remembered some of the newspaper articles by the same author, articles not to be skimmed but read with thought. A wide range of ideas is discussed, and music is seen from both the professional and audience points of view.

As I am 'audience' I appreciated this angle as books on musical topics are often geared towards a highly specialised readership. Tomes shows great affinity with her audience, perhaps dating back to the 1980s, when she was a leading member of the piano quartet Domus, which took live music to new audiences, performed in a geodesic-dome tent. More recently, as well as being a soloist and playing in various ensembles, she has been the pianist with the Florestan Trio (you will remember them playing for us at our Kings Place Sunday concerts), so her performing life has been incredibly varied.

As an audience we sit for a few hours, enchanted by the ease with which musicians perform for us, maybe comparing the music with our recordings at home or just happily humming along in our head or bowled over by a new composition – but probably vastly underestimating the years of study and the hours of practice required. In many ways the pianist has something of a lonely life, usually practising solo and having to adjust to new instruments in new concert halls. Tomes talks, however, of a "solitary paradise", which can occur when a private rehearsal achieves a certain clarity of moment and only the pianist is privy to this.

Practice is probably not well understood by the amateur. There are the notes, of course, the tempi and dynamics, then the teasing out of approach and interpretation. Tomes explores this very fully. The score is studied and researched – this is where the composer 'passes' the piece to the performer as 'curator'; then decisions are made on playing with or without the score (what feels best and what does the audience want in an age of theatrics?); then interpretation continues to evolve, often over years. Tomes writes of the "hard mental work" and "filtering the notes" and the hours of thought and practice before a concert or recording.

Integral to practice is memory. The essay on memories and memory is particularly interesting: remembering childhood music and melodies, recollections of happy and sad events, evoking performances by other musicians, recall of master classes. Then, lodged in the brain, is all the imagination, phrasing, presentation and even muscle memory: fingers 'remember' certain fingerings and may be obstinate in their reluctance to change.

Tomes gives a number of master classes to up-and-coming young musicians, with whom she empathises. Her own experiences at Prussia Cove made a big impact on her, and this feeds into her own classes. Apart from insights into the music and performance, she also gives time to advising newcomers on how to get a chamber group established and how to approach and cope with group dynamics, as well as pointing out the reality of how to earn a living through music. It is not an easy career choice. Domus appears to have been an experiment which audiences appreciated but gave the musicians little in the way of security or income.

This is not a solid, solemn book. Anything but. Tomes writes a graceful tribute to 'light' music and talks of her fondness for jazz. We also learn of the trials of relying on a page turner (will they, won't they get it right 100% of the time?). Then there is the question of fashion: what is comfortable, required, unsuitable? should the performer be in flamboyant or plain dress, and indeed does it matter? In the essay entitled 'Bullfrog' our attention is drawn to the topic of the audience that coughs and sneezes, something dear to my heart. There are a few amazing facts which should make us, the audience, take note. For example, an explosive cough can briefly be almost as loud as a pneumatic drill. Tomes distinguishes between a muffled 'medical' cough, the 'bark' and the 'recreational' cough – not to mention the 'Cough Rampant'!

I was a bit mystified as to the title of the book, but all is revealed at the end. When you read it, you will find the explanation in the Coda!

Chris Bradshaw

Chamber Music Notes Editorial Group: Chris Bradshaw, Leon Levy, Jane Sufian (editor), Walter Rudeloff, Rob Edgar

CHAMBER MUSIC NOTES

The LCMS Magazine

ISSUE 11 2015/2016

LONDON CHAMBERMUSIC SOCIETY

Welcome!

On behalf of the Trustees of the London Chamber Music Society, I am pleased to welcome you to the 2015-2016 season of our Sunday evening concerts.

As most of you will already be aware, Neil Johnson, our longtime Chairman, stepped down from that role last season. The sterling service Neil has given the LCMS over the years, more than 10 of those years as Chairman, has been of enormous benefit to the organisation, particularly through his careful and insightful work in the challenging job of moving the series from Conway Hall to Kings Place in 2008. We are pleased that he is continuing as a trustee. We also thank Vicky Yannoula for her valuable stint as LCMS Secretary and trustee.

For the LCMS 2015-2016 season our Artistic Director, Peter Fribbins, has assembled an intriguing selection of musical gems ranging from the baroque period to the contemporary, performed by musicians from both native and foreign shores. His 'Behind the Notes' column provides an overview of the season. For this issue Peter has also written 'Reflections on Classical Chamber Music', a thoughtful piece about what it means to assemble a concert series such as ours.

An enticing new series begins in November: the Chilingirian Quartet will be playing six programmes juxtaposing the six Bartók string quartets with the six Beethoven Opus 18 string quartets. Each concert will also include a work by Mozart. For the Magazine, Levon Chilingirian kindly agreed to answer some of Chris Bradshaw's queries about the series.

LCMS will be presenting a number of concerts to tie in with Kings Place's wonderful 'Baroque Unwrapped' series throughout 2016, including one by Florilegium. In this issue, Leon Levy takes us behind the scenes in his interview of Ashley Solomon, baroque maestro and co-founder and director of Florilegium.

LCMS is delighted to welcome two eminent North American visitors during the autumn. The Afiara Quartet has established itself as one of Canada's leading young ensembles. Timothy Kantor, their second violinist, writes here about the Quartet and the programme they will be playing for us.

The Fine Arts Quartet, founded in Chicago in 1946, has been called "The Dream Team" and "one of the gold-plated names in chamber music". The article about them in this issue concludes with a personal note from their British cellist, Robert Cohen, who describes Hall One as "a space that inspires my musical expression and communication."

In October the Fidelio Piano Trio will give the premiere performance of Benjamin Dwyer's 'Nocturnal, after Benjamin Britten'. An insightful conversation between Walter Rudeloff and Dwyer appears here in an abridged version; the full article is available on the LCMS website, **www.londonchambermusic.org.uk**

We hope that you will enjoy these and the other articles in this issue and, of course, all the concerts in the 2015-2016 season.

Jane Sufian
Editor

Afiara Quartet. Photo: Daniel Ehrenworth

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Behind the Notes

Our 2015-2016 London Chamber Music Sunday Series will have a decidedly baroque tinge to it, since we are incorporating a number of concerts to tie in with Kings Place's wonderful 'Baroque Unwrapped' series throughout 2016. As well as Red Priest on December 13 ('Vertigo – Baroque on the Edge'), we have Florilegium in January ('Music at the Court of Frederick the Great'), baroque violinist Elizabeth Wallfisch with Richard Tunnicliffe and Leon Schelhase in March in a programme of French music ('*Un Concert des Splendides, et des Folies*'), and Martin Feinstein directing baroque orchestral suites by Bach, Telemann and Handel in April. Baroque music is dear to my heart – I love its purity, directness and colour – so this piece of programming has been a joy. There will be more LCMS concerts in this series to come in autumn 2016 (including Bach's 'Musical Offering'), so dust off your periwigs!

As well as four string quartets before Christmas – the Wihan, Fine Arts, Afiara and Chilingirian quartets – the New Year adds visits by the Allegris, the Stradivari Quartet (all playing on Stradivariuses, of course!), and two more appearances by the Chilingirian Quartet in our exciting Mozart-Beethoven-Bartók series, reconstructing the first-ever complete cycle of Bartók quartets in the UK, given in 1949-1950.

And in addition to appearances by lots of familiar LCMS friends, including Raphael Wallfisch and John York, violinist Philippe Graffin, and Martino Tirimo's Rosamunde Trio, we have return appearances by the Aquinas Trio in March, and in February the brilliant Romanian violinist Horia Vacarescu, who leads an ensemble in a concert generously supported by the Romanian Cultural Institute.

The piano duo John and Fiona York will also visit in April to perform four-hand piano versions of Holst's The Planets Suite, Ravel's magical *Rapsodie Espagnole* and the hauntingly beautiful *Fantasia* by Schubert. The Holst is a particular treat, since not only is it the work's centenary in 2016, but it was John himself who discovered Holst's own four-hand arrangement of the work at the back of a cupboard at St Paul's School, where John taught piano for many years, and where Holst also taught music, of course, from 1905 to 1934.

Previous readers will know of my enthusiasm for extending our chamber series into chamber orchestras, exploiting the generous proportions of the Hall One stage at Kings Place. This year, I have managed to increase these events to two – the Cambridge University Chamber Orchestra directed by Howard Shelley in November, and the Firebird Orchestra to complete our season on 8 May 2016. My belief is that the fuller sound and texture of these events provides us with a wonderful aural contrast to the focus and intimacy of smaller chamber ensembles such as trios and quartets, and allows us to appreciate their particular qualities afresh in context.

Finally, I would like to write something about our exciting and important new collaboration with the Park Lane Group, founded in 1956 to promote young artists at the beginning of their professional careers. PLG young artists are always exceptional, and their list of artists over the last 60 years reads like a 'Who's Who' of distinguished musicians. The first concert, on October 25, features the great Schubert Octet, Mozart's Quintet for Horn and Strings, and a small gem by the Russian romantic Glazunov. A second concert on March 20 will include music by Richard Strauss, a Mozart string quintet, and Tchaikovsky's '*Souvenir de Florence*'. In these concerts we have the opportunity to hear performers many of whom will soon become some of the best-known names in their profession.

Dr Peter Fribbins
LCMS Artistic Director

Reflections on Classical Chamber Music

The 2015-2016 season will be my 14th year directing the London Chamber Music Society's series of weekly concerts, so I am taking this opportunity to write a different sort of article for the LCMS Magazine, and to reflect a little on what it means to assemble such a concert series. What exactly is chamber music, and why do we do it? Whilst I sometimes struggle to recall the intricate details of the nearly 400 concert programmes I've now helped to arrange for LCMS, ranging as they do from duos, piano trios, string quartets, quintets and wind ensembles to chamber orchestras, I am grateful for the unique opportunity this task has given me to survey, comprehend and absorb the astonishing canon that is classical chamber music. As a composer, the experience has been of incalculable benefit.

From the perspective of public reception, despite fears of disappearing audiences for classical chamber music – a recurring theme for so many years now – this wonderful repertoire continues to flourish, albeit arguably for a minority following. The traditional orthodoxy, as articulated in Arts Council research over the years, is that young UK adults often discover classical orchestral music in their 30s, with a proportion then beginning to explore chamber music in their 40s and 50s. If audiences for classical orchestral music constitute less than 5% of the population, the audience for chamber music is probably less than half that figure.

So the classical chamber music audience is small, very small. However, at the same time, it is a passionate, educated and sophisticated one. Is it not a middle-class, elitist leisure pursuit? (I am reminded of the conductor Karajan's comment that he was not an elitist but a "super elitist"!) Whilst elitism in society implies class divide, unfair privilege and societal schism, surely the pursuance of an *elite* intellectual and artistic sensibility is important for individual personal growth as well as for the wider benefit of society. The issue here is not elitism but access and social inclusivity. Whilst classical masterworks like Beethoven's late quartets may have been commissioned by a tiny group of aristocratic connoisseurs for private performance in Vienna in the 1820s – the ultimate minority audience pursuit – we don't actually need to be a noble to feel its aesthetically *ennobling* and ineffable resonances.

In the context of classical chamber music's complete failure to flourish as an unsupported and unsubsidised commercial activity ('How do you become a millionaire playing string quartets? Start as a billionaire!'), I think it is interesting to recall the Antiquity distinction between the liberal arts and the servile arts: the liberal arts can *liberate* us from the mundane and prosaic in life.

Consideration of the relative merits of different types and styles of music is virtually impossible to argue aesthetically, but some clarity can be gained in comparing their different uses and social functions. The importance of classical chamber music is not that it is a way of providing a classical musical experience on shoestring finance, but that its smaller and more concentrated musical gestures, in comparison to opera and orchestral music, can create more focused and intimate meaning. One of the best illustrations of this is the string-quartet medium, repertoire that is habitually central to our LCMS concert programmes. I do not have space here to extol its many and magical qualities, but as an example of classical music's ability to be transformative, sublime and ineffable, the quartet reigns supreme. As I increasingly perceive the spiritual potential of the best music in live performance, I also feel its parallels with liturgy. Whilst the word liturgy comes from the Greek λειτουργία, meaning public service and worship of the gods, the latter part of the word implies performance. In the ritual that is the classical chamber music concert, and in particular the hushed concentration demanded by string-quartet performance, its capacity for transformative aural alchemy is unparalleled.

Dr Peter Fribbins
LCMS Artistic Director

Afiara Quartet - Explorers of Collaborative Worlds

The Afiara Quartet (*front-page photo*)**, which will be performing in the LCMS series on 1 November 2015, has established itself as one of Canada's leading young ensembles. It has taken top prizes in many of the world's foremost competitions, including the Banff International String Quartet Competition, taking the Szekely prize for best interpretation of a Beethoven quartet. Timothy Kantor, the Quartet's second violinist, writes here about the Quartet and the program it will be playing for us.**

While the Afiara Quartet is dedicated to the interpretation of the existing string-quartet oeuvre, it is also deeply invested in expanding it. With more than 25 commissioned works and a number of high-profile premieres, we are always reimagining how chamber music can communicate with audiences. The Quartet currently has several different programs under way that explore the boundaries of the string quartet.

The Quartet was in London last year as part of a project that involved the live creation of a silent film called 'Nufonia Must Fall', bringing to life DJ Kid Koala's graphic novel by the same name. The plot is enacted by small marionettes, with the react to the rhythm of the Afiara Quartet's soundtrack. The music and visual elements of the show collaborate to bring three different experiences together for one audience: live music, live theatre, and silent film.

Another recent project is the subject of the Afiara Quartet's latest CD, 'Spin Cycle', which chronicles a multi-genre musical conversation. The conversation begins with Afiara's performance of four newly commissioned string quartets, each by a prominent young Canadian composer. Each piece is then remixed by renowned scratch DJ Skratch Bastid, reinterpreting what each work means. The composers then write a musical response to these remixes in the form of a string-quartet-plus-DJ quintet, taking elements from both earlier iterations to form works that are the culmination of the dialogue. The project fosters collaboration beyond the typical frontier of string-quartet music, communicating across genres and musical traditions.

The Afiara's program at Kings Place on 1 November will present all-classical works but maintain this dedication to the ideals of collaboration and musical depth. The program will feature Mozart's Clarinet Quintet and Peter Fribbins' Clarinet Quintet in a collaboration between Afiara and clarinettist James Campbell. With more than 40 recordings, a Juno award and an Order of Canada to his name, Campbell is one of Canada's most venerated musicians. In a career that spans more than 40 years, he has presented concerts all over the world, playing both classical and jazz styles.

The Kings Place concert will also feature Mendelssohn's A minor String Quartet. By the time Mendelssohn composed his string quartet Op. 13 at the age of 18, he was already an accomplished composer of chamber music. He was clearly inspired by the late Beethoven quartets that were published the year before, quoting these works (particularly Op. 132) and employing a similar structure. While Op. 13 cannot quite match the enlightenment and sophistication of Beethoven's greatest works (few if any works can!), it counters with an unbridled passion and romanticism. It bears the hallmark of greatness that showcases both learned maturity and youthful exuberance.

Mozart's Clarinet Quintet in A Major is one of his most refined pieces of chamber music. Written near the end of his career in 1789, it reflects the zenith of his musical capabilities, weaving together motives into one enormous tapestry. Written for the clarinettist Anton Stadler (Mozart himself referred to the work as the Stadler Quintet), it is largely responsible for the existence of the genre. By introducing the added texture of the clarinet to the well-established formation of the string quartet, he was able to create one of the most beautiful and enduring works in chamber music.

Peter Fribbins' Clarinet Quintet builds on the legacy of the Mozart, but adds a distinctive 21st-century approach to the genre. The work takes advantage of more than a century of musical and compositional advancement to create a sonic world that shows the influence of Brahms and Bartók as well.

If there is a theme to this program, it must be the spirit of collaboration. It features one masterwork for the string quartet by a young Mendelssohn inspired to write in new ways; a mature work by one of chamber music's greatest composers that introduces a new method of collaboration; and a 21st-century work that both continues these legacies and adds new elements. We are very much looking forward to this collaboration, and cannot wait to share it with the LCMS audience.

Writing *Through* an Instrument: Benjamin Dwyer

photos: © Tommie Miller

Benjamin Dwyer's 'Nocturnal, after Benjamin Britten' will be given its premiere by the Fidelio Piano Trio at the LCMS concert on 11 October 2015.

Walter Rudeloff: Where do you place your music in the vast range of contemporary composition?

Benjamin Dwyer: My formative years as a young composer were largely free from dominant schools, ideologies and trends. I was, however, strongly influenced by the fact that I was a professional performer, and I have always developed close relationships with specific players as a core process of my composition. Writing *through* an instrument, and not against it, or merely for it, is important for me. Not unlike Benjamin Britten, I tend to absorb different musical styles into a personal 'signature' that is unified; so while there is a certain eclecticism in my music, I like to think that it is also coherent, technically robust and individual.

I see my music as functioning like a kind of re-evaluation of modernist ideals. The modernists have inspired me most. Like them, I value an engagement with themes that matter. This explains my interest in aesthetic developments from the past that have established cohesive languages, in textural depth as an essential component of that language, and in schemata wherein things happen. Myth is also important for me, as is the notion that music may have a role in addressing the socio-political events that affect us all.

This stance explains my thematic choices over the past 15 years or so in my large-scale works such as 'Scenes from Crow', 'Umbilical', and a work I have recently completed, '*SacrumProfanum*'. These works explore big themes from the past and attempt to critique the present through (post) colonial, feminist and other political lenses.

WR: What sparks your creativity?

BD: I draw inspiration from various sources, and this points my music in different directions. I also tend to work on large projects, which often take many years to bring to fruition. So, for example, my 'Twelve Études' for solo guitar was a 10-year project to create a series of concert études that would build upon the famous '*Douze Études*' by the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, which form a cornerstone of the guitar repertoire.

Works such as my 'Twelve Études' represent one side of my compositional output – that which is connected with purely musical concerns. Another side of my work is that which responds to literary, political or mythical sources of inspiration.

WR: What is the background of your new piece, which the Fidelio Piano Trio will give the premiere performance of this October?

BD: A big factor in my work is the way in which my performing activities and my academic research infiltrate into my compositional practice. I've performed all the guitar works by Britten for many years, and my extended research on these pieces is published in 'Britten and the Guitar – Critical Perspectives for Performers' (Carysfort Press, Dublin). My engagement with Britten's music through both performing it and analyzing it has definitely impacted my compositional techniques. For example, Britten's work for solo guitar is of course his famous 'Nocturnal, after John Dowland', Op. 70. It's a set of variations and an extended passacaglia based on Dowland's lute song, 'Come Heavy Sleep'. One of the most special features of the work is that the variations and passacaglia precede the theme, which emerges only at the very end of the work after the music has gone through many transformations and explorations.

I decided to pay homage to Britten by employing a theme from his opera 'Gloriana – the Second Lute Song of the Earl of Essex' (from Act I, scene ii). However, this work is only Britten's through appropriation, as it is itself based on a madrigal by the English composer Thomas Wilbye (1574-1638) called 'Happy, Oh Happy He'. So, my 'Nocturnal' functions like a kind of palimpsest in that if you scrape away at the score you discover older music (Britten's), and if you continue scraping you find even older music again (Wilbye's). On one level, my 'Nocturnal' is an archeological dig into English music.

A core aspect of this, however, is my familiarity with Britten's 'Nocturnal'. I consider it the most significant work in the entire guitar repertoire, and I know it intimately as a performer, musicologist and composer. As a core method of composing my 'Nocturnal', I wanted not only to draw upon this deep familiarity, but also to tap into my intuitive experience of the work. I have employed the exact same structure – seven variations, a passacaglia and the theme at the end. By using this X-ray as a basis for my own work, I wish to engage with Britten with as much intensity as he has with Dowland, and indeed other Elizabethan composers. This is the best way I know to pay homage to a composer who brought so much to the guitar.

WR: Can you tell us about your work in the genre of chamber music?

BD: While I have written for nearly all formats from solo to orchestral, most of my music is for small or mid-size combinations. However, these generally do not fit within established formats such as the string quartet or the piano trio. 'Nocturnal, after Benjamin Britten' is different, as it challenged me to engage with the work of a major composer through a medium that has a long tradition dating back to the classical period. I would be lying if I didn't admit to a certain apprehension in the face of such a task. This is my second work for piano trio; the first is an early, student piece, so it more or less felt like I was tackling the piano trio format for the first time. On the other hand, the large-scale work I mentioned earlier, 'Umbilical', I think has been a useful experience. Almost an hour in length, 'Umbilical' was written for harpsichordist David Adams, Baroque violinist Maya Homburger and double bassist Barry Guy. While this is by no means a piano trio, it does work upon similar instrumental relationships to 'Nocturnal'.

WR: Are you working on something at the moment?

BD: I've been working on '*SacrumProfanum*' for about five years now. After such a long engagement with subject matter that weighs heavily on me, I feel it's time to revert to pure music, which is why I'm returning to the guitar in a compositional project I call '*Tiento*'. '*Tiento*' is both a Spanish word meaning 'touch' and a musical form prevalent in the Renaissance and Baroque periods that emerged out of virtuosic instrumental performance practices. To prepare for this project, I've started playing a number of *tientos* from the Spanish Renaissance *vihuela* repertoire (the *vihuela* is a forerunner to the Baroque guitar). I want to employ both historical performance practice and modern improvisation to renovate the *tiento* form as a new, contemporary mode of performance-informed composition. So my *tientos* will be about exploring the guitar through touch. My compositional process will be guided as much by the hands' local knowledge as by any applied compositional method I will use. It's really important that composers don't lose touch (there's that core idea again) with making music, that the compositional process does not become detached from the simple act of making music happen. This is another thing that Britten teaches us, and I'm happy that my *tiento* project will allow me to return to music through performing – it will be making by doing!

This is an abridged version; the full article is on the LCMS website. Ed.

www.londonchambermusic.org

Leon Levy Meets Ashley Solomon

A short local trip found me at the North London home of Ashley Solomon – baroque maestro, co-founder and director of Florilegium, flautist and recorder virtuoso, Head of Historical Performance at the Royal College of Music and, last but not least, family man.

Ashley's mother was a concert pianist; his father, an accountant; and his older sister, a flautist. Although not encouraged by his family to become a musician, at the age of nine he saw James Galway perform, and not long afterwards played 'Annie's Song' on the flute in front of the whole family. Since then, he and the flute have become inseparable.

Although he followed a conventional educational path, he never abandoned his music, and at the age of 16, progressed to the finals of the LSO and BBC Young Musician of the Year competitions. He won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, and took a year out of school to study the flute. During school holidays, he also made frequent trips to Haslemere to study with Carl Dolmetsch.

Aged 19 and destined to go to Cambridge, came the dramatic defining moment of his life, which established a career in music ahead of the accountancy profession originally envisaged by his father. Ashley had a severe electrocution accident, which so badly damaged his right hand he was told he would never play again. However, extensive surgery followed by eight hours of physiotherapy a day did the trick, and the experience convinced him even more that music was his future.

He went back to the Royal Academy, effectively to relearn the flute (and recorder), and was drawn to the baroque period. Playing period music on a modern flute just did not sound right to him, and there followed postgraduate studies in baroque and classical flute with Peter Holtslag at the Royal Academy of Music, and his career in this field took off.

The inevitable question about family life brought the truthful response that there is no easy solution. He has four daughters and his wife has a full-time career in a senior position at a major accountancy firm. Nannies and child care are inevitable, but despite extensive travelling, he and his family seem to have achieved a reasonable work/life balance. His soundproof studio and office at the bottom of the garden helps, especially when he wishes to practise in the early hours.

Outside classical music, Ashley's tastes include both jazz and avant garde. He is also now embarking on a conducting career, although he feels that conductors are not necessary in small-scale works such as the baroque and classical periods, which can often be easily and more fruitfully directed from the harpsichord.

He subscribes to the generally held view that London lacks a high-quality large concert hall, but for him and his music, Kings Place and Wigmore Hall are amongst his favourites. He has a special soft spot for the latter, as it is where he met his wife.

We discussed two major strands of Ashley's musical life – Bolivia and Florilegium. Bolivia is a great story, which started in 2002, when Florilegium participated in a music festival in the Bolivian jungle and played a short extract from a body of over 17,000 pages of sacred music, including native Indian music, from the period 1670 to 1767.

This music was enthusiastically received by the indigenous population. Highly attracted by this equivalent to European baroque, Ashley played a full programme of it at Wigmore Hall the following year. It was a sell out, and since then he has delved deeply into this enormous archive of music. He worked with native Bolivians to research and play the music, and Florilegium have now performed it in the UK, USA, Spain and Holland. In addition, this project has inspired many ordinary Bolivians to enter the world of their native music. In 2008 he became the first Briton to be awarded the prestigious Bolivian Hans Roth Prize for his work in bringing music to native Indians in the country.

And so to another success story – the world-famous Florilegium ensemble, co-founded with Neal Perez da Costa in 1991 with a group of students at the Royal Academy of Music. Originally known primarily for baroque performance, it is now one of the leading ensembles in the world not only for the baroque but also for the classical and early romantic periods.

Ashley feels that the future for performers of early music is bleak. He recommends that young performers aspire to a 'portfolio' career such as his – a mix of performing, teaching, researching and writing.

We discussed audiences. Ashley feels that communication between performers and listeners is an essential part of a successful concert. It is important for people to attend with the intention of being entertained, to be a part of the performance.

The phrase 'never stops' is particularly relevant to Ashley Solomon. So how can one man combine all these activities? Good organisation and support are essential, and he always has in mind that his family is very much a part of his 'portfolio'.

On 31 January 2016, Florilegium will be playing 'Music at the Court of Frederick the Great', part of the 'Baroque Unwrapped' and London Chamber Music series at Kings Place.

Getting to Know You

Introducing members of the LCMS/Kings Place Music Foundation community.

Frazer Mclean

Visitor Services Manager, Box Office, KPMF

photo: © Udall Evans

Frazer joined Kings Place in December 2014 as the Box Office Manager. He previously worked for six years at the British Film Institute. This followed on from studying Film Studies at Roehampton University, graduating with a BA (Hons). A part-time job working at a local multiplex to support these studies quickly turned into a career working in Visitor Services.

As well as these years at the BFI Southbank, and the accompanying London Film Festival, which Frazer took a core role in ticketing, he also worked as a box office manager in the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games. In this role he was exclusively responsible for the running of the Box Office for the Tennis tournament in Wimbledon as well as working variously at Wembley, Earls Court and the Olympic Park itself.

Kings Place is the first music venue Frazer has worked within and certainly his first exposure to chamber music. Previously, the only real connection to music Frazer has had is from the piano-accompanied silent film screenings within the BFI, so this has been a real learning experience and a chance to embrace another of London's great cultural activities.

Musically, Frazer is firmly a listener rather than a performer, with the exceptions of a brief stint as lead singer of a very mediocre rock band at the age of 14 and an A-level performance of Brecht and Weill's 'The Threepenny Opera', which arguably the audience may have felt as awkward listening to as he did performing it.

Mark Stephen Scott

Duty Manager, KPMF

Mark, who joined the Kings Place team in September 2014, can be found working as Duty Manager for the artistic programme at the venue. Prior to taking up this role in April 2015, Mark initially worked Back of House before moving to the Visitor Services team. With a broad interest in music, Mark graduated with a BMus (Hons) in Composition from Birmingham Conservatoire in 2012, where he studied with composers Michael Wolters, Howard Skempton and Edwin Roxburgh. During his time at Birmingham Conservatoire he was fortunate to be able to compose music for DECIBEL ensemble, The Schubert Ensemble, CHROMA, Black Dyke Band Quartet, and many ensembles at the Conservatoire including the Wind Orchestra.

After graduating from Birmingham Conservatoire, Mark began working in a wide variety of roles in the performing arts ranging from concert management, theatre production, arts fundraising and even working as a music facilitator for the Soundbeam Development Group, which aims to provide accessible music for people with severe and limited mobility who are at risk from social isolation. Mark has been playing the baritone in brass bands for over 15 years and through this has won numerous brass band competitions, most recently the Midlands Area Brass Band Championships for the fourth section in March 2015.

Moving to London in September 2014, Mark began studying at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, where he is studying production and theatre studies. At present, he is currently working on the production of a new musical-theatre dance piece and also currently writing his own new musical to be premiered in 2016. In addition to these he is currently working on the design and creation of a new theatre, which aims to bring theatre and the arts to deprived London boroughs.

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