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ORSINO ENSEMBLE

Thursday 27 February, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

Pieces for musical clock

Joseph Haydn

Umoja

Valerie Coleman

Wind Quintet, FS 100

Carl Nielsen

Interval

Wind Quintet, Op. 10

Pavel Haas

Sextet in E flat, Op. 71

Ludwig van Beethoven

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.

Please ensure hearing aids are switched to the appropriate concert setting.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Pieces for musical clock

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

'Musical clock', 'mechanical clock' and 'flute clock (German: Flötenuhr)' are generally interchangeable terms for a clock to which is attached a clockwork mechanism for playing music ('mechanical organ' generally describes a mechanism not attached to a clock). The mechanism operates a bellows which directs air into a set of organ pipes, with pins mounted on a rotating cylinder to open and close each pipe as required.

Musical clocks were particularly popular in Vienna between about 1720 and 1820, designed to play arrangements of overtures, arias, parts of flute concertos and sonatas, marches and dances. Music was also specially written for them by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and other composers of the period. Some of these pieces are still performed, usually in transcriptions for organ or wind ensemble.

Prince Nicholas Esterházy, Haydn's employer for much of his career, was an enthusiastic collector of clocks in general. He is said to have owned 400 or so, and kept six musical clocks at his summer palace, Eszterháza, three of which have survived. His court librarian, Primitivus Niemeetz, built mechanical organs in his spare time, and asked Haydn to write music for some of them. Thirty-two compositions and adaptations for musical clock are attributed to Haydn.

Umoja

Valerie Coleman (born 1970)

Flautist and composer Valerie Coleman was born in Louisville, Kentucky. She began her formal musical education at the age of eleven, showing an early interest in composition, and by the time she was fourteen she had written three symphonies. She continued her studies at the Mannes School of Music, New York, and while a student there, she founded the ensemble Imani Winds, with the aim of championing under-represented non-European composers.

Umoja was written in 2001, and Imani Winds gave the first performance. The title refers to part of the African-American and pan-African festival, Kwanzaa, a celebration of family, community and culture, established in 1966, and running from 26 December to 1 January each year. 'Umoja', the Swahili word for unity, is the first of the Seven Principles around which the festival is organised, one for each day.

In Coleman's words: "The original composition calls for unity through the tradition of call and response and was first meant to be a simple family sing-along song for Kwanzaa ... The melody is mainly a French horn solo with supporting rhythms from the upper winds and a constant motor played by the bassoon."

Wind Quintet, FS 100

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

1. *Allegro ben moderato*;
2. *Menuet*;
3. *Praeludium. Adagio – Tema con variazioni. Un poco adagio.*

Nielsen once described the progressive stages through which his approach to composition developed: "I began with the piano which I later transcribed for orchestra. The next stage was that I wrote my score directly for instruments. Now I think through the instruments themselves, almost as if I had crept inside them. One can very well say that the instruments have a soul."

The Wind Quintet, which Nielsen began immediately after completing his Fifth Symphony, is a particularly delightful example of this third stage. The immediate prompt came when, one autumn evening in 1921, Nielsen telephoned his friend the pianist Christian Christiansen, who was in the middle of rehearsing Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for four wind instruments with members of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet. Hearing them continuing to play in the background, Nielsen was intrigued, and asked if he could come over and sit in on the rehearsal. Within a few months he was at work on a piece for the group, and it was given its premiere in April 1922.

The Quintet explores the character not only of each instrument but of each player as well, and Nielsen planned to follow it up with a series of concertos, one for each of them. In the end he lived to complete only two, those for flute and clarinet.

The amiable first movement is based on three themes: the opening bassoon solo, a livelier idea marked by chattering repeated notes, first played by the flute and oboe, and a smoother horn theme heard over a softly rippling flute and clarinet accompaniment.

The relaxed, easy-going mood is maintained in the Minuet, but the central section turns a touch wistful as it moves into a minor key.

For the Praeludium that introduces the final movement the oboist is asked to change to cor anglais. Its darker tone emphasises the serious nature of this section, which is almost an independent movement in its own right. What follows is a simple hymn-tune, 'Min Jesus, lad min hjerte faa' (My Jesus, Make my Heart Love You), one of Nielsen's Salmer og Aandelige Sange (Hymns and Sacred Songs) written in 1913 and 1914. He had no conventional religious beliefs, and as Robert Simpson points out in his book on the composer, there is no significance in his choice of theme other than its delightful character and its suitability as the basis of the eleven variations that follow.

Nielsen's point about 'thinking through the instruments themselves' really comes into its own in the way the variations are sharply characterised and contrasted. The first is a dialogue between the horn and bassoon. The flute takes the lead in the perky second variation, the oboe in the rather more plaintive third, and all five instruments have an equal share in the rhythmically alert Variation 4. Nielsen's gift for instrumental comedy takes over in No 5, in which the clarinet, dipping and soaring over virtually its entire range, is clearly rattled by the almost stolidly unflappable bassoon. The sixth variation, quiet and serenely wistful, is followed by a ruminative unaccompanied bassoon solo. Variation 8 is a pastoral episode for the three upper instruments over a drone on the horn and bassoon, while No 9 is for solo horn – part song, part fanfare. Flute and bassoon lead off the graceful tenth variation, while the clarinet takes charge in the humorous march that is Variation 11. The hymn-tune returns, now four-in-a-bar instead of its original three, bringing this delightful work to a warmly smiling close.

Wind Quintet, Op. 10

Pavel Haas (1899-1944)

1. *Preludio. Andante ma vivace*
2. *Preghiera. Misterioso e triste*
3. *Ballo eccentrico. Ritmo marcato*
4. *Epilogo. Maestoso*

Pavel Haas was born in Brno, the capital of Moravia (the eastern part of the present-day Czech Republic), and studied with Leoš Janáček at the Conservatoire there. After graduation, he could work on composition only in his spare time, at first, but after his marriage in 1935 he was able to devote himself full-time to composing and private teaching.

As a composer he was influenced by Moravian folk music and traditional Jewish chant, as well as the scoring techniques of composers such as Stravinsky and Honegger. Among his most successful early works are his Second String Quartet (subtitled 'From the Monkey Mountains' – referring to the highlands straddling the Bohemian/Moravian border), and his tragi-comic opera *The Charlatan*, for which he wrote his own libretto. The String Quartet is one of many works reflecting his interest in jazz, including as it does an added percussion part in the last movement, a feature of the score that outraged some members of the audience at its premiere in 1925, and which Haas later withdrew.

In 1941 he was deported to the Nazi prison camp at Terezín, from where he was sent to Auschwitz in October 1944. Most of the music he completed there is lost, with only a male-voice chorus, a group of four songs and his Study for string orchestra surviving.

Composed in 1929, his Wind Quintet contains undeniable echoes of Janáček, as well as of Jewish synagogue chant and Czech folk song. After the rustic-sounding Prelude, *Preghiera* (Prayer) sounds a meditative note, before the perky Eccentric Dance of the third movement ('*Ritmo marcato*' = emphatic rhythm). Epilogue ends the Quintet in a pensive mood.

Sextet in E flat, Op. 71

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Transcribed for wind quintet by Mordechai Rechtman

1. *Adagio – Allegro*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Menuetto. Quasi allegretto*
4. *Rondo. Allegro*

Most of Beethoven's chamber music for wind ensemble dates from before 1801, when the genre was generally regarded as a medium for light music. It belonged with the serenade or *divertimento* tradition to which Mozart made so many contributions – purely functional music, written to order as accompaniments to outdoor social events or as *tafelmusik*, background music for indoor banquets.

In its original form, Beethoven's Sextet is scored for pairs of clarinets, bassoons and horns. It was probably written during a visit to Prague in 1796, though the first two movements may date from before then. It seems not to have been performed until 1805 and, as so often, Beethoven appears to have become less enthusiastic about the piece as he got older. In a letter to the publisher Breitkopf and Härtel in 1809, he claimed to have written it in a single night, which is probably not true, but suggests his attitude to the work as a mere trifle he simply dashed off. He went on: "All that one can really say about it is that it was written by a composer who has produced at any rate a few better works."

The first movement begins with a short slow introduction, leading to a brisk three-in-a-bar allegro. The stately, song-like second movement is followed by a Minuet, into which Beethoven inserts a reference to the opening of Mozart's String Quintet in E flat, K614. The ebullient Rondo is full of perky rhythms and well-varied textures. Whatever Beethoven's subsequent opinion of the work, it remains a delightful, unpretentious example of his early manner.

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ORSINO ENSEMBLE

Adam Walker, flute
Nicholas Daniel, oboe
Matthew Hunt, clarinet
Amy Harman, bassoon
Alec Frank Gemmill, French horn

The Orsino Ensemble is a flexible format chamber ensemble with a central focus on the five outstanding wind players at its core. Each a leader in their field, the group's members are committed to showcasing the depth and versatility of the wind chamber repertoire; expanding and reducing the ensemble's format as needed across their different programmes.

The ensemble was founded in 2018 with inaugural performances at the Aldeburgh Festival. Other recent highlights have included performances at Wigmore Hall, Sibelius Hall, Helsinki, and appearances at West Cork Chamber Music, Chipping Campden, Two Moors and Ryedale Festivals, as well as a weekend residency at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. The ensemble has collaborated with artists including Pavel Kolesnikov, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and Katya Apekisheva.

The Orsino Ensemble's first recording, featuring French repertoire for Winds and Piano, was released for Chandos in 2021 to critical acclaim across the board, with *The Guardian* praising the recording as 'a disc that beguiles and dazzles in every bar'. This was followed in 2023 by 'Echoes of Bohemia'; a disc exploring the strong tradition of Czech wind playing through works by Reicha, Janáček, Pavel Haas and Martinů.