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PIATTI QUARTET

Thursday 12 June, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

Langsamer Satz (Slow Movement)

Anton Webern

String Quartet in E flat, Op.12

Felix Mendelssohn

Interval

String Quartet in E minor

Ina Boyle

String Quartet in F, Op.96, 'American'

Antonín Dvořák

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

Langsamer Satz (Slow Movement)

Anton Webern (1883-1945)

Together with Webern's much longer single-movement String Quartet (not to be confused with his later String Quartet, Op.28), *Langsamer Satz* was composed in the summer of 1905. Both works remained unperformed until May 1962, when they were first played in Seattle, on consecutive days, by the University of Washington String Quartet; they were published three years later.

Webern had begun studying with Arnold Schoenberg in autumn 1904, and his teacher's influence soon began to make itself felt. *Langsamer Satz* has a Brahmsian feel, but there are also echoes, in terms of both expression and sonority, of Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night) for string sextet, which Webern heard in the autumn of 1903.

Many of Webern's works have direct autobiographical resonances. *Langsamer Satz* was written following an idyllic five-day walking holiday with his cousin Wilhelmine Mörtl, whom he was to marry in 1911. It is dominated by the opening theme, an aspiring idea rising in successive waves through almost three octaves. The music is generally warm and flowing, often tranquil, but twice swelling into a broad, passionate climax.

String Quartet in E flat, Op.12

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

1. *Adagio non troppo – allegro non tardante*;
2. *Canzonetta. Allegretto*;
3. *Andante espressivo*;
4. *Molto allegro e vivace*.

When Mendelssohn was writing his early works, the string quartet was becoming increasingly overshadowed by the popularity of chamber ensembles involving the piano. Although he was more open to experiment than is sometimes acknowledged, he was conservative enough to feel a kinship with the Viennese tradition of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, who had brought the string quartet to such a peak of development. In addition, he had a greater working knowledge of string technique than pianist-composers such as Schumann and Brahms, thanks to the enthusiastic music-making of his family circle, in which he took part both as a player and as a composer. By the time he came to write his Op.12 Quartet he had behind him his series of symphonies for strings which culminated in one of his outstanding masterpieces, the Octet of 1825, as well as two earlier quartets: another E flat work, not published until 1879 and still virtually unknown, and the A minor Quartet, Op.13.

Op.12 was begun in the summer of 1829, during Mendelssohn's first visit to England, and completed in September, after he had returned from the tour of Scotland which produced *The Hebrides* and his Symphony No.3 ('Scottish'). Following the slow introduction, the *allegro* opens with one of those urbane, singing melodies so typical of Mendelssohn, with a touch of rhythmic waywardness in its second phrase to give it spice. The central section begins like a repeat of the opening but soon goes off in a different direction, bringing with it a new theme which is to play an important role in the end of both this movement and the finale.

The *Canzonetta* is dry, crisp and delicate in its staccato opening and closing sections, while the middle section is full of fast, scurrying figures, in Mendelssohn's 'fairy music' manner. The song-like third movement rises to a passionate climax before leading into the finale, which is all whirling excitement and headlong rhythmic drive. At its height the activity is suspended briefly for a recollection of the new theme from the central section of the first movement, which prepares the ground for Mendelssohn's novel conclusion to the work. As the music's energy

begins to wind down towards the end of the movement, this theme reappears, leading to a return of the first movement *allegro*'s opening theme, followed by a virtually identical repeat of that movement's ending – an unusual procedure for the time, but it makes a deeply satisfying conclusion.

String Quartet in E minor

Ina Boyle (1889-1967)

1. *Allegro moderato*;
2. *Adagio*;
3. *Allegro molto*.

Born in Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, Ina Boyle studied violin and cello, and took composition lessons in Dublin, and by correspondence with her cousin-in-law, the Armagh-born Charles Wood, a one-time pupil, and later teaching colleague, of Stanford, and best-known for his Anglican church music. In 1923 she began travelling to London for lessons with Vaughan Williams, which continued on an occasional basis until the late 1930s. Her extensive output includes orchestral, choral and chamber music, and a large quantity of songs.

The composer Elizabeth Machonchy, a close friend, described her music as “predominantly quiet and serious, never brilliant, though it has its moments of wit or passion. In idiom it is closest perhaps to Vaughan Williams in his early middle period – but it is not just a pale reflection of his style; her music always speaks with a personal tone of voice, which at its best can express deep feeling by simple means.”

Her String Quartet dates from 1934, and dedicated to violinist Anne Macnaghten, who ran a pioneering concert series in London in the 1930s, with conductor Iris Lemare and composer Elisabeth Lutyens, giving a platform to young composers and performers. It was given its first public performance by the Macnaghten Quartet, in a broadcast on the BBC National Programme, on 15 July 1937.

The first movement opens with a soaring theme for the first violin. Patterns of quick repeated notes interrupt three times, leading eventually to a skippy new theme. Later, the mood becomes more strenuous and unsettled, but the opening theme continues to be a central point of reference, and the movement ends in a thoughtful frame of mind.

The second violin opens the E major central movement with a theme that rises, to be met by a falling phrase for the first violin, which soon develops into a broad song-like melody. This, and the first movement's opening theme, no doubt reflect the Quartet's dedication to Anne Macnaghten. Like the first movement, this dies away introspectively.

The viola sets the pace for the final movement, a bubbly jig-like scherzo-finale. Less impetuous episodes intervene from time to time. The music arrives at a climactic point, when is briefly stopped in its tracks, before the emphatic ending.

Edition prepared by David Byers, a member of the Ina Boyle Society's Artistic Advisory Committee.

String Quartet in F, Op.96, 'American'

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

1. *Allegro ma non troppo*;
2. *Lento*;
3. *Molto vivace*;
4. *Vivace ma non troppo*.

In September 1892, Dvořák began his three-year appointment as Director of the newly-established National Conservatory in New York. The following summer he and his wife, Anna, spent a holiday in the Czech settlement at Spillville, Iowa, joined by their children. In these idyllic surroundings he began two chamber works: his F major String Quartet and String Quintet in E flat, Op.97. The Quartet was sketched in three days and completed two weeks later. Its spontaneity and freshness, and the transparently simple structure and harmonic language that Dvořák deliberately cultivated, have helped to make it by far the most popular of his quartets.

Trill-like figures on the violins and a sustained note on the cello provide a backdrop for the rhythmically alert opening theme, played by the viola, then the first violin. The mood remains genial, becoming even more relaxed with the second main theme, one of Dvořák's most gloriously expansive melodies, for the first violin over initially slow-moving harmonies on the other three instruments.

Like the slow movement of Dvořák's Ninth Symphony ('From the New World'), completed two months before, the *Lento* has a melancholy wistfulness all its own. Based on a single song-like theme, it reaches a passionate climax before subsiding to its gentle conclusion. It is followed by a bright, rhythmic scherzo, whose opening theme includes a phrase said to be based on the call of the scarlet tanager, a bird which Dvořák often heard on his walks in the woods surrounding Spillville. The two trio sections are based on a slower version of the scherzo's main theme.

The second violin and viola launch the finale with a syncopated rhythmic figure which provides much of this ebullient movement's forward drive. There is a quiet central chorale-like episode, which a number of writers have suggested evokes Dvořák improvising for the congregation on the organ of the settlement church in Spillville. The high spirits soon return, and they carry the movement through to its exuberant final pages. How appropriate that the happiest period of Dvořák's American stay should have produced one of his sunniest, most carefree works.

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PIATTI QUARTET

Michael Trainor, violin

Emily Holland, violin

Miguel Sobrinho, viola

Jessie Ann Richardson, cello

Resident Quartet at Kings Place, London, the distinguished Piatti Quartet are widely renowned for their 'profound music making' (*The Strad*) and their 'lyrical warmth' (*BBC Music Magazine*). Since their prizewinning performances at the 2015 Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, they have performed all over the world and made international broadcasts from many countries.

The Piattis are famed for their diverse programming and for passionate interpretations across the spectrum of quartet writing, and have commissioned and recorded some of the most major and impressive works added to the quartet canon in recent years.

Since their inception, they have always had projects in the recording studio with critically acclaimed releases through Linn, Rubicon, Somm, Champs Hill, Hyperion, Delphian, Nimbus and NMC record labels. Their wide-ranging discography and repertoire is thanks to their enthusiasm and curiosity in collaborating with a broad range of artists including some of the most recognisable names in classical music such as St. Martin's Voices, Nicky Spence, Julius Drake, Michael Collins, Barry Douglas, Janina Fialkowska, Melvyn Tan, Ian Bostridge, Katherine Broderick, Adam Walker, Simon Callaghan and the Belcea Quartet. Accolades in 2023 include a Presto Music Award as one of the 'Top 10 Recordings of the Year 2023', a *Gramophone's* 'Editor's Choice for the Month' with NMC, a five star review from *BBC Music Magazine* with Delphian and in 2022 they were nominated for 'Recording of the Year' with both *Limelight* and *Gramophone* for their collaborative disc on the Hyperion label.

Contemporary music has been ever present in their repertoire and leaving a legacy to the quartet genre through commissions is one of the quartet's central tenets. Major commissions and dedications have stemmed from Mark-Anthony Turnage, Emily Howard, Charlotte Harding, and Joseph Phibbs whilst they have premiered a mesmerising number of new works over the years beginning with Anna Meredith back in 2009. The Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Flagey Radio Hall Brussels, Wigmore Hall London, and the Aldeburgh Festival are some of the high profile occasions where new music has been presented and recordings of Turnage's quartets 1-4 and Gavin Higgins' chamber music has also been extensively lauded by critics.

Historical research into quartet music that has been undiscovered or deserves to be better known has led to the premiere recording of Ina Boyle's (Ireland) SQ in E minor, and performances of lesser known quartet gems by Ralph Vaughan Williams, E.J. Moeran, Rachmaninov, Ireland, Haas, Ulmann, and Durosoir.

The quartet's name is dedicated to Alfredo Piatti, a 19th-century virtuoso cellist who was a professor at the Royal Academy of Music (the alma mater of the founders of the quartet) and also a major exponent of chamber music and contemporary music of his time.