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Mithras Piano Trio

Ionel Manciu - violin

Leo Popplewell - cello

Dominic Degavino - piano

Sponsored by The Countess of Munster Musical Trust

13 November 2021

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Programme



Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809)

Trio in G Major Hob.XV:41

Allegro; Menuet; Adagio; Finale: Allegro

Despite its late Hoboken number, this is one of Haydn's earliest trios. Completed by 1767, this work was likely written in the early 1760s, around the time he started working as vice-Kapellmeister in the court of Prince Esterházy, where he would be destined to spend the majority of his professional life. As with all of his early trios the keyboard instrument play a dominant role, with the violin and cello serving to add support and sonority to the what would have been, in Haydn's time, a rather weak-sounding instrument.

The first movement is a proud and stately Allegro, full of elegance and wit. The Menuet continues in a similar vein, but contrasts with a rather spindly trio section in G minor, the rotating figuration in the piano somewhat machine-like. A beautiful Adagio follows this, characterised by a highly ornamented keyboard melody which clearly has its roots set in a baroque style. Charm and elan return in the Finale, which interestingly features two moments of independence between the cello and the left hand of the piano - a sign of things to come!

Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924)

Trio in D minor op.120

Allegro ma non troppo; Andantino; Allegro vivo

Fauré began his career as a church organist and choirmaster and it was at this relatively early stage that he wrote his famous Requiem. In 1896, however, he was appointed professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, where his pupils included Ravel and Enescu, and was the director there from 1905 till his retirement in 1920. He wrote some fine pieces of chamber music. His only piano trio was written in 1922-23 when his health was failing. And he was not well enough to attend its first public performance on his 78th birthday.

The first movement is in something like sonata form, with two subjects: a slightly agitated oscillating phrase introduced on the piano and a leisurely singing phrase soon introduced on the cello and taken up by the violin. The subjects seem incompatible at first but they are wonderfully integrated by the end.

The slow movement has been aptly described as a 'meditation' on two themes. The strings introduce the first theme, a sweeping and slightly sad melody to which the piano adds a chordal accompaniment. The second theme — abrupt, syncopated and angular — is introduced by the piano. Here too the composer draws on affinities between the themes that had earlier been barely hinted at so as to bring incongruous elements into an organic whole.

After the sweeping phrases of the earlier movements the intensity and even violence of the finale takes the listener aback. It is difficult to believe this movement was written by a man who suffered, as he put it, from 'perpetual fatigue'. Fauré was still at the height of his creative powers.

--- INTERVAL ~10 minutes ---

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Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Trio no.2 in E flat major, D.929, Op 100

Allegro; Andante con moto; Scherzo (allegro moderato) and Trio; Allegro moderato

This great work received its first performance, in one of the Viennese Entertainments organised by the violinist Schuppanzigh on New Year's Day 1828, a year of which Schubert was not to see the end. It is not simply the key that tempts one to call it Schubert's Eroica. There is a spaciousness and at times a heroic grandeur about the music, which evokes the comparison, but there are at least two paradoxes here: first that a work for only three players can, without straining the language of chamber music, tread the ground of a symphony orchestra, and also that that very language should at the same time be Schubertian through and through.

Typically of Schubert, the fanfare-like first theme has hardly run a rounded course before modulations take place, and after only about a minute string trills and the piano's chromatic scales dump the music into a very distant key for a long flow of secondary material, broadly deployed, which settles at length into the orthodox complementary key (that is, the dominant key of B flat) confirmed by diatonic scales up and down. At the beginning of the development a held solitary note on the 'cello brings in the most lyrical of these secondary themes which is treated to no less than three modulatory cycles, an astonishing procedure whereby the music seems to recede further and further away into a magical distance. The long process by which the home key is established, to say nothing of the cross-rhythms in this central section, are undoubtedly heroic in their effect. The large time-scale then produced enables not only a full recapitulation to be used, but also a tailpiece which seems reluctant to say good-bye to the wealth of themes.

The basic C minor of the next movement and the dotted rhythms of the accompaniment of its main theme remind us of the Eroica again, but the con moto direction forbids us to dawdle over the funeral march, if that is what it is. There are, in the midst of wonderful melodies, two thunderous climaxes both marked fff, no less. The second of them, with imagined trumpets and drums in C major, typically cannot bring the music to triumph. It ends at a slower tempo with two sighs.

The scherzo for a while plays in canon, that is, with the piano exactly imitated at a bar's distance by the strings, or vice versa. With the trio section, a much more beer-garden atmosphere sets in.

The last movement begins as though it is going to be content with easygoing dance measures. Within the basic two-in-a-bar the main subject divides into three's, the next – after one pizzicato note – into four in repeated notes. The third paragraph reverts to three to a beat and is marked by rapid scales mostly, but not all, on the piano. With these ample materials the music proceeds to a development. In the midst of it, without changing the tempo, comes a surprise: the 'cello plays the main theme of the slow movement, sotto voce. Not only this, but in the intense quiet leading back towards the recapitulation, the piano alludes to the slow movement's repeated chords, though without the tune. As the movement's design is apparently complete, the 'cello again plays the funeral tune. Great is the joy when the violin joins in and corrects it to the major, the essential Schubert effect.

The Mithras Piano Trio

Praised for their 'exquisite phrasing', 'full-blooded commitment' and 'bold, passionate colours', the Mithras Trio is fast growing a reputation as one of the next generation's most exciting piano trios.

Formed in 2017 at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, they benefited from regular tuition with Matthew Jones, Carole Presland and Ursula Smith, and have also received coaching from András Keller, Caroline Palmer, Rolf Hind, David Dolan and the Endellion String Quartet. They have performed in masterclasses with Ralf Gothóni, Levon Chilingirian, the Takács, Danish and Emerson Quartets, and Alasdair Tait, and have undertaken residencies in Snape Maltings (Suffolk) and at the Schulich School of Music (Montréal) performing to professors including Isabel Charisius, Byørg Lewis, Kyoko Hashimoto and the St. Lawrence String Quartet.

They are currently members of the prestigious BBC New Generation Artists scheme, broadcasting regularly on BBC Radio 3, and they won first prize at the 10th Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition, 67th Royal Over-Seas League Music Competition, Cavatina Intercollegiate Chamber Music Competition 2019 and the St. James Chamber Music Competition 2018. In 2019 they were recipients of the Royal Philharmonic Society Henderson Award. They have performed at many of London's major venues, including Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Milton Court Concert Hall, as well as making regular appearances in festivals in the UK and Europe. They were selected as Kirkman Concert Society Young Artists for the 2019/2020 season, and are currently on the Countess of Munster Trust Recital Scheme.

They are also passionate exponents of contemporary music, having worked extensively with Helen Grime and Julian Philips, and gave the world première of a new piece by Péter Tornyai at the Solti Hall in Budapest, who dedicated the work to the Mithras Trio after working with them.

Future Farnham Concerts

Friday 3 December 2021

Spire Church (URC), South Street, Farnham, GU9 7QU

Elizabethan Christmas Concert – Eisenach Ensemble

(Carol concert scheduled for 18 December has been cancelled)

Saturday 22 January 2022

Spire Church (URC), South Street, Farnham, GU9 7QU

Mathilde Milwidsky (violin) and Gamal Khamis (piano)

Bach, Part, Beethoven, Grieg, Wieniawski

Saturday 26 February 2022

Spire Church (URC), South Street, Farnham, GU9 7QU

Piano Trio Yuri Zhislin, Natalia Lomeiko & Alexander Karpeyev

Medtner, Bruch & Brahms

Saturday 19 March 2022

St Andrew's Church, Farnham GU9 7PW

Farnham Sinfonia

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Future Conservatoire Concerts

7-00 pm Friday & Saturday 26 & 27 November 2021

Godalming Baptist Church, GU7 1BA

Chamber Music Festival

Saturday 15 January 2022

Godalming Baptist Church, GU7 1BA

Baroque Day

See website for details

www.conservatoireconcerts.org.uk