

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective Sunday 18th February 2024

The music to be performed this morning was written within eighteen years.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor 1875-1912

Piano Trio in E minor

Moderato, Allegro con moto

Scherzo, Allegro leggiero

Finale, Allegro con furiant

Coleridge-Taylor was born in London. His father was a doctor from Sierra Leone and his mother was English. Croydon was his home and as a child he sang in a church choir and took violin lessons. In 1890 he enrolled at the Royal College of Music where he studied violin and composition. His tutor was Charles Villers Stanford who regarded Coleridge-Taylor as one of his most promising students. A commission from the Three Choirs Festival, prompted by Edward Elgar, caused Coleridge-Taylor to write his Cantata *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*. This was performed across the UK and USA and is his best known piece to date.

The piano trio in E minor dates from 1893. It was not published in his lifetime and was recently found in the library of the Royal College of Music, London. Coleridge-Taylor was strongly influenced by the chamber music of Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann and this trio follows the conservative mould. Form, structure, harmonic pace and direction are all as he would have heard and absorbed from his musical influences. This is an early piece and as he matured and travelled, particularly in the USA, his music developed and took on a stronger character.

The first movement has rhetorical drama from the outset with sweeping string melodies and rhythmic piano passages. Development of themes follows well known patterns. Eg. reworking a passage in the major, having been originally in the minor. There is little extension of melodies but the energy continues throughout with all three instruments working clearly towards the firm cadence. A light hearted dance movement follows. Here the emphasis is on the first and third beats of the bar, thus propelling the piece forwards. The piano leads the textural developments and brings the movement to a close. Three strong chords announce the third movement. These give way to fluid instrumental lines with the piano often back in its rhythmic supporting mode. There are strong echoes of the chamber music of Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann here and the texture and declamatory mood would have been very familiar to musicians and concert goers of the time. The trio is rounded off with a confident flourish.

Edward Elgar 1857 - 1934

Salut d'amour Op 12

Elgar was born in a large family where his father was a piano tuner and Organist in Worcester. From an early age he played the violin and piano and he joined musicians in Church and the local music societies. Formal musical training was out of reach financially and all Elgar's knowledge of orchestration, development of themes, form and structure came from his close study of scores as and when he could find them. As a young man Elgar played in the orchestra for the Worcester Festivals and began to work on extending his musical ideas and building longer and more extensive pieces than his early chamber works.

In 1886 Elgar was establishing himself as a piano teacher in Malvern. His pupil Caroline Alice Roberts, a more confident woman ten years older than him and from an established county family was his ideal and they became engaged. *Salut d'amour* – Love's greetings was originally written by Elgar to be played just by themselves and with a simple dedication *a Carice*, but when he sent it to London for publication he gave it the title by which it is now known.

Today we shall hear the piece arranged for Violin, Cello and piano. The piano is essentially providing the rhythmical character and impetus while the violin sings the melody which in E major gives many rich overtones and has all the warmth needed in this love letter. The cello, mostly in its middle register sometimes echoes the violin rhythmically but much of the time keeps a steady sustained line against which the piano's offbeats can bounce. Violin and cello work in 3rds and 6ths enriching the harmony. Structurally it conforms to small scale pieces with repetition of the opening section. Following this, a new key of G is heard for a short time, before the most complex and chromatic few bars which form the Golden Section. The E major theme returns, is extended by a short sequential passage but then draws the piece to its close with the piano and cello holding the original theme while the violin soars up to the important high E.

Louise Hérítte-Viardot 1841-1918

Piano Quartet in A Major Op 9 *In Sommer – In Summer*

Allegro un poco animato. Des Morgens im Walde – Mornings in the Forest

Scherzo. Fliegen und Schmetterlinge – Flies and Butterflies

Die Schwüle – Sultry weather

Vivo allegretto, Abends unter die Eiche – Evenings under the Oak

Louise was born in Paris, the daughter of a famous singer, composer and teacher of Spanish origin, Pauline Viardot. Throughout her childhood Louise was in contact with many well regarded musicians and writers from across Europe whose work was then part of her natural sound world. Wagner, Clara and Robert Schumann, Berlioz and the writers Turgenev and George Sand among others.

Louise became well known as a singer, pianist, conductor and composer and her brother Paul Viardot was also a conductor. They both demonstrated the self confidence of their extraordinary mother whose performing life took her to many countries and expanded her knowledge of different musical styles and developments through personal contacts. Louise married Ernest Hérítte and she kept her parents' name as she was becoming known as a singing teacher in Berne where she and Ernest lived.

Most of Louise's compositions are for chamber ensembles and very few pieces are extant. The piano quartet Op 9 was written in 1883. It is programmatic music and each of the four movements has a subtitle offering the listener an idea of place or mood. Throughout the quartet the piano holds a strong place within the ensemble. There is easy interplay between instrumental lines and influences from both Clara and Robert Schumann's chamber writing are heard. Louise's prowess as a pianist is demonstrated here and it reminds us of the elegance of Clara Schuman's piano writing. Clara was a long standing friend and colleague of Pauline Viardot, Louise's mother. A life lived in such a musical household surely gave Louise a strong start in the profession.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Quartet No 3 in C minor, Op 60.

Allegro ma non troppo

Scherzo

Andante

Finale: Allegro

In 1855 the young Brahms was living in the Schumann household in Düsseldorf. Robert was in a sanatorium at his own request following a suicide attempt; his wife Clara had recently had her seventh child and was also trying to maintain her brilliant international career as a pianist (often in concert with Joachim). Brahms was acting as head of the household, dealing with bills and tradesmen, and had fallen in love with Clara who reciprocated, as she told her diary:

“It is not his youth that attracts me...No, it is the fresh mind, the gloriously gifted nature, the noble heart, that I love in him.”

Brahms started work on a piano quartet in C# minor. In April of the following year the work was sufficiently completed for Brahms and Joachim to try it out. It consisted of three movements with a central Andante and a passionate Finale. But Brahms at that time struggled with large-scale works, and the piano quartet was not a popular form. In October Clara saw a “wonderful Andante” perhaps replacing the Adagio. Another run through with Joachim, and then nothing for 12 years when he showed it to the critic Hermann Dieters with the words: “Now imagine a man who is just going to shoot himself, for there is nothing else to do.” Another 5 years later in 1873 he returned to it, fundamentally rethinking it and lowering the key a semitone to C minor. The first movement remained and the original last movement may have been transformed into the present Scherzo, which interestingly has no formal Trio. The new Andante and Finale both start with long solos, on cello and violin respectively, and may have come from unfinished solo sonatas. Brahms described the work as a curiosity, having something of his youth and something of his more mature self. But it lacks for nothing in passion and still echoes the emotional turmoil of his Düsseldorf days. When he sent the finished work to Simrock his publisher, Brahms repeated (with his tongue partly in his cheek) the allusion to Goethe’s suicidal hero Werther:

“You might display a picture on the title page. Namely a head – with a pistol pointing at it. Now you can form an idea of the music! I will send you my photograph for this purpose! You could also give it a blue frockcoat, yellow trousers, and riding boots, since you appear to like colour printing.”

The first movement, reworked from the original quartet, “pitches us into a whirlpool of romantic tribulation” as the strings’ initial pair of falling semitones perhaps “speaks the name Clara” followed by a version of the 5-note Clara motif used by Schumann in his Fourth Symphony (MacDonald, p 226). After a development of “wrathfully strenuous variations” the “bitter, strife torn coda sinks as if in exhaustion”. Youthful, obsessive love indeed. So too with the youthfully dynamic Scherzo whose coda ends in angry despair. But the wonderful new Andante is anything but suicidal. It is set in E major producing a breathtakingly optimistic major third rise in key from the previous C minor. The cello and violin ecstatically wrap themselves round each other. Brahms presented this movement to another of the women in his life, Elisabet von Herzogenberg whom he had recently met again.

The last movement's long opening violin theme reappears slightly changed in Brahms' G major violin sonata and in the song *Regenlied* (Song of the Rain), with its mood of anxiety and regret. The movement also combines chorale like episodes with an irascible triplet figure. Towards the end the music quietly descends, perhaps exhausted, until the final two shot-like chords.

Programme notes by Helen Simpson (Coleridge-Taylor, Elgar and Hérítte-Viardot) and Chris Darwin (Brahms)