

Dora Pejačević 1885-1923

Piano Quartet in D minor Op. 25

Dora was born in Budapest to an aristocratic family. Her father was a Croatian count and her mother a Hungarian singer and pianist. This maternal influence was to guide Dora away from an unfulfilling aristocratic life into a more challenging musical future. A pseudo-biographical film "Countess Dora" was made in 1993.

Her musical education came from Zagreb, Dresden and Munich and she developed a wide circle of friends such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Karl Kraus and the pianist Alice Ripper. Some of her earliest compositions are songs and solo piano pieces. The Piano Quartet Op 25 was the first such for this combination. Previously Dora had made an arrangement of a piano impromptu and set it for Piano Quartet. In 1908 her D minor Piano Quartet Op 25 set her on a new track combining strings and piano in her early romantic style. She was 23yrs old.

Allegro ma non troppo The first movement is immediately engaging with long sweeping lines from the strings underpinned by pianistic energy.

Andante con moto A sweet rich opening gives way to interplay between the cello and viola while the piano ripples the harmonic skeleton alongside them. There is a simplicity here that belies the complexity of the whole quartet, however it acts as a contrast to the other movements in the accepted manner of the time.

Menuetto This is more tart and rhythmic at its opening. Predictability in the menuetto is saved by the repeat of the more spikey opening. Harmonically this movement is straightforward and has no surprises.

Rondo This combines all the stylistic elements of the early movements. Strings pass the themes to each other while the piano for the most part provides a rich accompaniment with flashes of thematic material. The quartet closes with a suitably dramatic cadence.

Robin Holloway b.1943

Piano Quartet Op 143 This is dedicated to Tom Poster and today's performance is the World Première.

Robin Holloway is a well known composer. He studied English and Music at Kings college Cambridge. Composition tuition was taken from

Alexander Goehr and Bayan Northcott. His doctoral thesis was on Debussy and Wagner. Cambridge is still home and throughout his working life he has taught composers such as Thomas Adès, Huw Watkins, Peter Seabourne, George Benjamin, Judith Weir and Jonathan Dove. Holloway's own music has been summed up by David Matthews as being "formed by a productive conflict between Romanticism and modernism". In addition Holloway has written numerous articles and book reviews.

Johannes Brahms 1833-1897

Piano Quartet No.1 in G minor

Brahms was born in Hamburg and was familiar with Beethoven and Bach's musical sound-world. As a young man he made a name as a pianist where he made more money than as a composer with published scores. His repertoire was mainly Bach and Beethoven. Brahms is now known for having imposed classical order on his compositions which marked him out in the period of otherwise Romantic music. In 1861 the year of the composition of his G minor piano quartet Brahms was struggling for recognition as a composer. Now in Hamburg, Clara Schumann, 14yrs his senior, was sympathetic and performed the piece in Hamburg in 1861, the year of its composition.

Brahms had written violin sonatas for Joseph Joachim and trios and string quartets but the piano was so important that it was simply embedded into the string ensemble of violin, viola and cello. Brahms performed the piece himself in Vienna in 1862.

Allegro This is homophonic with regular phrase lengths. The piano is thoroughly integrated with the strings. The D major contrasting section gives way to a reprise of the G minor opening. The pianist composer is obvious here.

Intermezzo: Allegro ma non troppo Strings open this lilting dance-like movement. The piano swiftly joins in and the melody is shared. There is the beginning of Brahms' use of 2/3 rhythm common to many later pieces. This movement is also in ABA structure and as such conforms to expectations. Brahms spells Clara's name in the melody with C & A kept, but B & G substituting L & R. A short coda rounds off.

Andante con moto A broad balanced opening theme sets this up in E $\flat$ major, a rich sounding key. *Animato* marks a shift to C major and a change of texture and mood which is martial and decisive in nature. The reprise is prepared then realised in E $\flat$ with a fuller and more flowing texture. It closes with a measured relaxing phrase.

Rondo alla Zingarese Here is a real dance with plenty of rustic charm and virtuosic playing for his audience. *Meno presto* Now a bold slower tempo here as directed, but still it's a dance. The mood relaxes briefly and then through a series of short sections teases the listener as false climaxes are reached and immediately dissolved. The pianistic dominance brings the whole quartet to a triumphant finish.

Helen Simpson