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**THE SCHUBERT ENSEMBLE
OF LONDON**



Friday, October 27, 2000

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Friday, November 24, 2000



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Programme

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Piano Quartet in C minor Op 60 "Werther"

1. Allegro non troppo
2. Scherzo: Allegro
3. Andante
4. Finale: Allegro comodo

GIOVANNI BOTTESINI

Passione Amorosa

Intermission

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Piano Quintet in A major, D667 "The Trout"

1. Allegro Vivace
2. Andante
3. Scherzo: Presto
5. Theme and Variations: Andante
6. Finale: Allegro giusto

THE SCHUBERT ENSEMBLE OF LONDON

**Simon Blendis - violin Douglas Paterson - viola Jane Salmon - cello
Peter Buckoke - double bass William Howard - piano**



NEWaccents

NOUVEAUXaccents

Programme Notes

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Piano Quartet in C minor Op 60 "Werther"

Brahms first worked on the C minor piano quartet from 1854 to 1856, a period of great strain and anxiety for the young composer. With his benefactor and dear friend Robert Schumann suffering with severe mental illness, Brahms found himself torn between fidelity to Robert and deep affection for Clara, Schumann's wife. When Robert was hospitalized, Brahms rushed to Dusseldorf to help Clara and her seven children through those difficult days. During that period Brahms wrote to her, "Would to God that I were allowed this day ... to repeat to you with my own lips that I am dying for love of you." He remained with her only until Schumann died in July 1856. Many of the complex and turbulent emotions Brahms was suffering seem to have flowed into the piano quartet. When Brahms played through the piece, though, he was not pleased and set it aside for further work. Seventeen years later, in 1873, Brahms finally returned to the quartet. He transposed the key to C minor, from the original C sharp minor thus making the parts easier for the string players. Of the original work, he kept the third movement intact, revised the first, and composed entirely new second and fourth movements.

The recast version was completed during a summer holiday near Heidelberg in 1875; some twenty years after its original conception, but the feeling tone remained the same. "You may place a picture of the title page," he wrote to the publisher when submitting the manuscript, "namely a head - with a pistol in front of it. This will give you some idea of the music. I shall send you a photograph of myself for the purpose. Blue coat, yellow breeches. and top-boots would do well, as you seem to like colour printing." Because the description fits Werther, the morbidly sentimental hero of Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Werther*, who kills himself for the unrequited love of his friend's wife, the quartet acquired the subtitle. "Werther."

The tragic character of the C minor piano quartet is most strongly felt in the first movement. The opening subject grows from a descending minor second, a musical sigh of pain. The gloom is relieved somewhat by the lyrical second theme in the major mode, but its descending melodic line casts a slight pall. Brahms immediately varies this theme before developing both themes and bringing them back for the recapitulation.

The Theme of the nervous and intense Scherzo is heard in the piano: occasional misplaced accents trip up the forward-rushing notes. After a brief pause, the strings state the second theme, which starts sedately enough, but immediately develops a sort of musical twitch. A calmer interlude in major serves as the contrasting trio before the return of the Scherzo proper.

The emotional center of the entire quartet, and the putative favourite of Brahms, is the Andante. To many listeners it is a lovely, deeply sentimental love song. Biographer Richard Spect considers the opening cello melody to be Brahms's reluctant farewell to Clara, a pained acknowledgement of their doomed relationship. The tender syncopated second theme adds a beguiling beauty to this exquisite movement.

The essential texture of the Finale is fabricated from the strings spinning out expansive, cantabile melodies, while the piano skitters along in a rushing, perpetual motion of rapid figurations. Charm and warmth prevail, but never without a tinge of sadness. Of special interest are the two choralelike sections that seem to recall a religious hymn.

Brahms and members of the Hellmesberger Quartet gave the first performance in Vienna on November 1875.

Melvin Berger

GIOVANNI BOTTESINI

Passione Amorosa

Giovanni Bottesini was a great nineteenth century virtuoso double bass player. His only comparable rival was Domenico Dragonetti who was his senior by 58 years.

Bottesini was invited to London shortly after the death of Dragonetti. He was clearly seen by the city's elite as Dragonetti's replacement. But Bottesini soon staked out his own place, easily eclipsing the earlier master. A telling exchange took place between Bottesini and a reviewer:

'We should have engaged you in the first place, not Signor Dragonetti,' the reviewer opined.

Bottesini replied, 'I was but four years old at the time. Would that have mattered?'

The remark was repeated for decades - long after Bottesini's death - often with other favoured artisans taking his place in the anecdote.

Passione Amorosa is a typical piece of Bottesini writing. It is very theatrical and lyrical in the extreme. It covers various moods but never loses the character of an operatic love duet. The piece is written in various tempi connected by piano interludes of varying length, which set the scene and sometimes have an improvisatory quality.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Piano Quintet in A major, D667 "The Trout"

Chamber music for performance with family, friends, fellow choristers and professional musicians was at the heart of Schubert's life and no work illustrates this musical sociability better than the Trout Quintet.

In the summer of 1819, Schubert had been invited by Michael Vogl, the sympathetic interpreter of his songs, to stay at his home in Upper Austria. Here Schubert was surrounded by magnificent scenery and the pleasures of good company and was able to make all the music he wished. The Trout Quintet was the result. According to Stadler, it was written at the special request of Paumgartner, a friend of Vogl.

Paumgartner arranged musical gatherings and he wanted another quintet for the same combination of instruments as the newly published Hummel's E Flat Minor Piano Quintet, using a double bass instead of a second violin. Also Hummel's Quintet is in four movements, the standard number. Schubert inserts a fifth movement, the Theme and Variations, using his song *Die Forelle* (The Trout), composed in the autumn of 1817 as the theme, most probably at Paumgartner's suggestion.

The music also reflects Schubert's preoccupation with composition for four hands. In July 1818, Schubert went to Count Johann Esterhazy's country seat at Zseliz in Hungary as music teacher to the Count's two daughters and four handed pieces were a practical and enjoyable means of instructing the two young Countesses.

Music for four hands remained important for the rest of his life. The Trout reflects this preoccupation, the piano being contrasted with the stringed instruments, like one piano in lively conversation with another.

The music is a serenade for chamber ensemble and the variations on *Die Forelle* in particular give it this quality. Haydn's variations on the Emperor Hymn provide a model for this movement. The theme is announced by the strings and then taken up in turn by the piano, the viola, and the cello with the double bass. In the fourth and fifth Variations, there are developments into the keys of D minor and B flat major. The B flat major Variation forms a bridge-passage to the Finale in which the Trout melody finally appears in all its delightful simplicity with the original accompaniment.

Schubert was Paumgartner's guest in both 1823 and 1825 and presumably The Trout Quintet would have been performed at some point in those visits. Michael Vogl made the quintet known to a publisher soon after Schubert's death and so the work was presented to the world. As William Mann writes "The Trout Quintet belongs at home; if you and some friends can play it, you do but if not a record in your own living room is the next best thing."

The Schubert Ensemble of London

Winner of the 1998 Royal Philharmonic Society Award for best chamber ensemble, the Schubert Ensemble of London has established an international reputation as Britain's leading chamber group performing music for piano and strings. Founded in 1983, the Ensemble has toured worldwide. In the UK the Ensemble is well known through regular broadcasts on BBC Radio and on Classic FM, appearances in London's major concert halls, and touring to every part of the British Isles.

In 1999 the Ensemble gave over 70 concerts, including tours to the USA, Canada, Holland, Germany, Spain, Scotland, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, and appeared twice at the Wigmore Hall in London. The year 2000 sees a return visit to the Wigmore Hall in November, broadcasts for the BBC, and concerts in Spain, Italy, Scotland, Ireland, Canada and Norway.

Despite the Ensemble's association with Schubert, it has developed a wide repertoire for various combinations of its five instruments, including all the major works for piano quartet. It also has a strong commitment to presenting contemporary music to a wide audience, usually in the context of more traditional works, and has commissioned over 25 new works from many of the UK's leading composers.

The Ensemble has recorded works by Schubert, Hummel, Schumann and Dohnanyi for Hyperion and works by Judith Weir for Collins Classics. For ASV it has recorded Schubert's Piano Trio No.2 and the *Arpeggione* Sonata, a disc of chamber works by Korngold (described in *The Times* as "a vibrant, virtuoso performance") and a series of the complete Brahms and Mendelssohn piano quartets, all three discs of which have met with critical acclaim. In June 1999 the Ensemble featured on the front cover CD for *BBC Music Magazine*. January saw the release of the two Faure piano quartets on ASV.

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