



PROGRAMME
NOTES
30th September
2017

The Sacconi Quartet with Charles Owen

**Ben Hancox (violin), Hannah Dawson (violin),
Robin Ashwell (viola), Cara Berridge (cello)
with Charles Owen (piano)**

**Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet Op.76 No 3 (Emperor Quartet) (1797/8)**

1. Allegro 2. Poco adagio: cantabile 3. Menuette: Allegro 4. Finale: Presto

String Quartet Op.76 No 3, dedicated to the Hungarian count Joseph Georg von Erdődy (1754–1824), is the third of six in Haydn's last complete set of string quartets, Op 76. It is nicknamed the "Emperor (*Kaiser*) Quartet", on account of the melody known as the "Emperor's Hymn (*Kaiserlied*)" in the second movement, which he wrote for Emperor Francis II. It was a product of the years after his triumphant visit to London (1791-92 and 1794-95), where he had been exposed to a newly emerging genre, the national anthem. He was especially impressed by the stately sounds of the English anthem "God save the King", and decided to compose something equally impressive for Austria. It became the national anthem of Austria in 1847, and of Germany in 1922 after Austria had abandoned it in favour of another. The tune has also been turned into Christian and Masonic hymns. Haydn always loved it. In his final years, when he was unable to compose, he would play it on his piano and weep.

The frolicking first movement is in sonata form, and mixes energetic high spirits, intricate counterpoint, and some harmonic adventures. Just before the recapitulation, the principal theme turns into a welcome-to-rural-Hungary folk dance in E major, then into a spooky variation in E minor, which gives way to the original theme in C major. The second movement uses the elegant "Emperor's Hymn" as a basis for variations. Samuel Adler has singled out this movement as an outstanding example of how to score for string instruments. The third movement continues the first movement's intriguing juxtaposition of major and minor, but is, rhythmically speaking, a fairly

conventional minuet, which is a surprise coming from a composer who liked to stretch the minuet form beyond its dance origins. The quartet closes with a sometimes strident, sometimes lilting, but invariably dramatic “Finale: presto,” again in sonata form.

Jonathan Dove (b. 1959)
Piano Quintet (with Charles Owen) (2009)

Jonathan Dove is a London-born English composer of opera, choral works, plays, films, and orchestral and chamber music. He studied music at the University of Cambridge, and afterwards worked as a freelance arranger and accompanist until 1987, when he was employed by Glyndebourne Opera. He has arranged a number of operas for English Touring Opera and the City of Birmingham Touring Opera (now Birmingham Opera Company), including in 1990 an 18-player two-evening adaptation of Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* for CBTO.

The Piano Quintet was commissioned for the Spitalfields Festival, where Dove had been artistic director from 2001-6, to celebrate the 80th birthday of George Law, a long-standing patron of the festival. He began writing it in May 2008 in Umbria, where he was in residence with a Civitella Ranieri Fellowship. It was also the first work of a new phase of his compositional life, when after a very hectic few years, culminating in his largest opera, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, he took a six-month sabbatical. He comments: “...I wanted to write music independent of outside sources. So this Piano Quintet has no programme or hidden story. The bells in the second movement are not the bells of Gubbio; yet, in some way, I suspect that all those summer sensations have coloured this score.”

The first movement, marked ‘Energetic’ starts with a little piano figure that could be evocative of birdsong, and also playfully refers to the opening gesture of his first big operatic success ‘Flight’. It is a *moto perpetuo*, with two points of rest, a floating theme interrupts twice, and there is a striking, extended build up from the depths of piano and cello to the extreme top of the range of all instruments. The slow movement is the emotional heart of the piece, starting with a serene threnody that could be a distant and sunnier relation of the famous *Adagietto* from Mahler’s Fifth symphony. This is interrupted by a striking bell-like figure in the piano, and these two discrete sound worlds eventually build to a solemn processional. Though Dove disavows a programme for this work, the music is visual and atmospheric and builds to a climax of almost cinematic intensity. The finale is a more rumbustious, straightforward piece, with a catchy tripping rhythm, which though regular, cunningly wrong-foots the listener, and it sustains a summery festival mood to a joyous conclusion.

Antonín Leopold Dvořák (1841- 1904)
Piano Quintet No 2 Op 81 (with Charles Owen) (1887)

- 1. Allegro: ma non tanto 2. Dumka: andante con moto**
3. Scherzo (*Furiant*): molto vivace 4. Finale: allegro

Piano Quintet No 2 in A major, Op. 81, is easily one of the finest examples of late Romantic chamber music. The work was actually composed as the result of Dvořák's attempt to revise an earlier work, Piano Quintet in A major, Op. 5, which he did not like, and destroyed soon after its premiere. Fifteen years later, he reconsidered and retrieved a copy of the score from a friend and started making revisions. However, he decided that rather than submitting the revised work for publication, he would compose an entirely new work. The new quintet is a mixture of Dvořák's personal form of expressive lyricism as well as a utilization of elements from Czech folk music. Characteristically those elements include styles and forms of song and dance, but not actual folk tunes; Dvořák created original melodies in the authentic folk style.

The first movement opens quietly with lyrical cello theme over piano accompaniment which is followed by a series of elaborate transformations. The viola introduces the second subject which is another lyrical melody, but much busier than the cello's stately line. Both themes are developed extensively by the first and second violins and the movement closes with a free recapitulation and an exuberant *coda*. The second movement again makes use of the *dumka* (the epic ballad, specifically the song or lament of captive people) to devastating effect. The piano introduces the movement's main theme in the form of a delicate, wistful figure in F-sharp minor. Accompaniment by the strings is minimal so as not to intrude too heavily upon the gentle introversion of the piano's theme. A somewhat brighter D major interlude is provided and is followed by the main theme, this time played by the viola with the piano providing understated accompaniment. The movement rushes to a close with a frenzied, schizophrenic repeat of the movement's principal theme. The playful third movement is in the form of a *furiant* (a fiery Bohemian dance with a pronounced Slavic character), which is not quite evident until the trio section where Dvořák ingeniously tinkers with the rhythm. The finale, in the form of a rondo, begins with a furious burst of syncopation in the piano leading to a series of raucous 16th-note passages in the strings. The second violin leads the movement's main theme into a fugue-like development. The brakes are applied at the *coda*, which Dvořák marked *tranquillo*, as a stately chorale offers one final bit of introspection punctuated by the piano. The tempo once again picks up as the movement rushes to an exuberant close.

Musicians

The Sacconi Quartet was named after the Italian luthier and restorer Simone Fernando Sacconi, who wrote *The Secrets of Stradivari*, an indispensable reference book for violin makers.

The award-winning Quartet, formed in 2001 at the Royal College of Music, is well known for its creativity and integrity of interpretation. It has retained its four founder members, **Ben Hancox** (violin), **Hannah Dawson** (violin), **Robin Ashwell** (viola) and **Cara Berridge** (cello), whose professional lives are mostly taken up by playing in the Quartet. But they also enjoy other musical challenges including playing in other groups, teaching, and launching music festivals, whenever chances arise.

The Quartet has enjoyed a highly successful international career, earning many accolades. Musical Opinion (22 May, 2006) describes it as “an exceptional ensemble” with “a unanimous sense of musical breath and a meticulous attention to detail.” The Times (22 February, 2009) praises it for the “beautiful blend of sound.” The Daily Telegraph (22 April, 2006) considers it as “a quartet of genuine substance.” The Spectator (22 October, 2008) writes that it has “great power and sweetness” with “intimate closeness.” The Strad (22 November, 2010) admires its “envious technical prowess.” Edward Clark (British Sibelius Society, 23 July, 2015) goes as far as to say that its performance of Sibelius's '*Voces intimae*' is the finest he has ever heard. Stephen Pritchard (the Guardian & The Observer, 13 July, 2015) describes its performance as “triumphant.”

Charles Owen, described by Gramophone magazine as “one of the finest British pianists of his generation”, studied in London at the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Royal College of Music. He has enjoyed an extensive international career performing a wide ranging repertoire to outstanding critical acclaim. His numerous awards include the Silver Medal at the Scottish International Piano Competition (1995) and the 1997 Parkhouse Award with violinist Katharine Gowers. He is a professor of piano at the Guildhall School in London and has recently been appointed Steinway & Sons UK Ambassador.



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