



**PROGRAMME  
NOTES  
25th November  
2017**

## **Bartholomew LaFollette (Cello) Caroline Palmer (Piano)**

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)  
Cello Suite No. 4 in E flat Major**

This piece is the fourth of Bach's Six Cello Suites for unaccompanied cello, BWV 1007 to 1012, which are some of the best-known cello music ever composed, and considered to be among the most profound of all classical music works. Bach probably composed them during 1717-1723, when he served as Kapellmeister in Köthen.

These suites are remarkable in that they achieve the effect of implied three- to four-voice contrapuntal and polyphonic music in a single musical line. As usual in a Baroque musical suite, each movement is based around a baroque dance type; the cello suites are structured in six movements each: prelude, allemande, courante, sarabande, two minuets or two bourrées or two gavottes, and a final gigue. Wilfrid Mellers described them in 1980 as "monophonic music wherein a man has created a dance of God."

Due to the works' technical demands and difficulty in interpretation because of the non-annotated nature of the surviving copies, the cello suites were rarely publicly performed until they were revived and recorded by Pablo Casals in the early 20th century. They have since been performed and recorded by many renowned cellists, have also been transcribed for numerous other instruments, and are considered some of Bach's greatest musical achievements.

Suite No. 4 is one of the most technically demanding of the suites, as E flat is an uncomfortable key on the cello, and requires many extended left hand positions. The prelude primarily consists of a difficult flowing quaver movement that leaves room for a cadenza before returning to its original theme. The very peaceful sarabande is quite obscure about the stressed second beat, which is the basic characteristic of the 3/4 dance, since, in this particular sarabande, almost every first beat contains a chord, whereas the second beat most often does not.

**Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**  
**Arpeggione Sonata in A minor D821 (1824)**

1. Allegro moderato    2. Adagio in E major    3. Allegretto in A major

This sonata is the only substantial extant composition for the arpeggione (“a bowed guitar”). Schubert composed this for his friend Vincenz Schuster, who invented the arpeggione only the previous year. By the time the sonata was published posthumously in 1871, the arpeggione had long since vanished. Today, it is heard almost exclusively in transcriptions for cello (or viola) and piano.

The first movement, in A minor, is imbued with sadness and joy (as was Schubert’s own life), the beauty, sensitivity and lyricism of its first theme contrasting with the carefree nonchalance of the second, a shattering outburst of pain at the climax of the development section and culminating in the death sentence of the two closing chords. The second movement theme is derived from the Larghetto of Beethoven’s Second Symphony, and shares the simplicity of the Largo of Chopin’s later Cello Sonata. However, a sinister undercurrent emerges, threatening the tranquil beauty of this world and anticipating the icy bleakness of the *Winterreise*. It ends in an experience close to death, the pace slowing almost to a complete stop before finding the most fragile of lifelines to carry the music through to the finale. The last movement begins as an ecstatic rondo, the gushing theme predominantly bathed in the sunshine of A major, interspersed with energetic, lively interludes with traces of folk idioms and demanding considerable virtuosity from both performers. A nostalgic piano solo temporarily eclipses the spotlight on the string instrument before the final return of the rondo theme, ending with one of the many rising arpeggios (broken chords) that characterise this work, a positive and satisfying end to a composition that has reflected the whole gamut of human experience.

❧ ❧    INTERVAL    ❧ ❧

**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**  
**Four Serious Songs Op. 121 (1896)**

This work is a cycle of four songs for bass and piano, and represents the only composition published in the last year of Brahms's life. They are compact, refined, uncompromising masterpieces, with words from the Bible. The biblical texts of the first two songs are chosen from the pessimistic early chapters of Ecclesiastes and the third from the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (or Jesus Sirach). The fourth song, the major-key hymn to love (or "charity") from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians is not as "serious," but it represents the culmination of a progression across the cycle from bitterness to edification, from pessimistic realism to humanistic transcendence. Nonetheless, as in the Requiem, Brahms wanted no misunderstanding, so they are explicitly "serious," not "sacred." The songs were composed during his good friend Clara Schumann's final illness, and when he himself was suffering from liver cancer, hence the sombre mood that brought them forth. The progression from despair to love across the set is reflected in the fact that each song becomes more "major" than the one before it. No. 1 is completely minor. Nos. 2 and 3 have major-key endings, but that of No. 3 is proportionally larger. Nos. 2 and 3 display some thematic connections in their chains of descending thirds. The piano parts are generally rather economical, although the faster "dust storm" sections of No. 1 and the many left-hand leaps of No. 4 are challenging. No. 3, particularly when it reaches the section in 4/2 (*alla breve*), has a benedictory character from which No. 4 must work hard to escape. The songs are meant for bass, made explicit by Brahms through his use of the bass clef. A high-voice version exists, and women do sing them on occasion, but there is no doubt that Brahms's indication of a lower male voice is the most suited for the songs, even when it is strained to its upper limit at the end of No. 4. The texts lend themselves to several effective shifts of meter, tempo, and occasionally key. This uncompromisingly honest final testament of the sung word is also a textbook pattern for how to set biblical texts in a skilful manner.

**Edvard Hagerup Grieg (1843-1907)**  
**Sonata for cello and piano in A minor, Op. 36 (1883)**

1. Allegro agitato 2. Andante molto tranquillo 3. Allegro molto e marcato

Grieg composed this piece, his only work for this combination, for his brother John, a keen amateur cellist. The work borrows themes from Grieg's own *Funeral March in memory of Richard Nordraak* and the wedding march from his *Three Orchestral Pieces from Sigurd Jorsalfar*.

Grieg's frustrations and difficulties with traditional genres (sonata, string quartet, symphony, etc) are well-documented in his personal letters, but this cello sonata's urgent energetic dramatic thrust, as well as voluptuous smooth melodiousness, has ensured its position as one of the best-loved late 19th century cello sonatas.

The first movement's opening theme is as full of *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) as they come, and its second gushes with a most extraordinary warmth. There is, quite unexpectedly, a little cadenza for the cellist midway through the movement, just before the recapitulation; one cannot help but notice that when the pianist enters again the music takes a rumbling, ominous tone quite like one heard in the cadenza of the famous Piano Concerto's first movement. The slow movement is in a warm F major; as the opening musical paragraph gives way to the second and third paragraphs, it becomes clear that all is not as innocent and sweetly lyrical as the lovely opening melody would suggest. Indeed, there is real desperation in the middle of the movement. After a quiet introduction, the lengthy finale assumes the shape of a dark-hued goblin-dance that ends in robust A major.

## Musicians

British/American cellist **Bartholomew LaFollette** has a rich and varied career as an international soloist and chamber musician. After being launched by the Young Classical Artists Trust, he won several awards, including the first prize at the Arts Club, Decca Records inaugural Classical Music Award, and the Irish Chamber Orchestra Ardán Award.

Bartholomew is Artistic Director of the Marryat Players International Chamber Music Festival, and is also a sought-after chamber musician and a teacher. He frequently appears with the award winning Doric String Quartet among others, and in 2011 at the age of 26, he was appointed Principal Cello Teacher at the distinguished Yehudi Menuhin School.

He was hailed by the Irish Times for being “as free in touching the heartstrings as he was in dashing off dazzling runs.” David Barmby writes in Limelight Magazine after his Australian tour as guest cellist of the Sitkovetsky Trio in July 2017, “... his music making was notably free, imaginative and intelligent.”

The Singapore-born British pianist, **Caroline Palmer**, studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. Winner of several prizes, she has established a reputation as a chamber musician and soloist and has performed in the USA and throughout Europe. She has been a participant in various chamber music festivals in Europe and America. Alongside her career as a pianist she has been a piano professor at the Guildhall since 1990, where she coaches chamber repertoire as well as teaching individual students.

Caroline Palmer has made several recordings with many artists, and has made numerous recordings as soloist and chamber musician for the BBC.

This concert was sponsored by Michael  
Martin Partnership Certified  
Accountants  
[www.mmpaudit.co.uk](http://www.mmpaudit.co.uk)



 @whitmus6

 [facebook.com/groups/  
WhitstableMusicSociety](https://facebook.com/groups/WhitstableMusicSociety)