



Concert Programme Winter/Spring 2022



Dvořák's American Quartet

BSO Chamber Ensemble

St George's Bristol

Tuesday 22 March

R Strauss

Sextet from Capriccio

10'

Dvořák

String Quartet 'American'

27'

Interval

Mozart

Divertimento in D Major

K.136

13'

Schoenberg

Verklärte Nacht

29'

Mark Derudder

Carol Paige

Violins

Tom Beer

Miguel Rodriguez

Violas

Jesper Svedberg

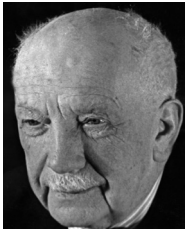
Thomas Isaac

Cellos

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Sextet from Capriccio

Richard Strauss

Born: 11 June 1864 Munich

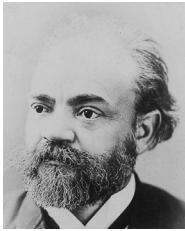
Died: 8 September 1949 Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Capriccio was Strauss's final opera, composed between 1940 -41, and first performed at the Munich Staatsoper in 1942. Described as a 'Conversation Piece for Music', it is set in a château, the home of a young Countess, near Paris, in about 1775. Her guests are discussing which is more important in opera, the words of the poet, or the music of the composer. Flamand, musician and composer, and the poet Olivier are the chief protagonists in the debate; to complicate matters, they are both in love with the Countess and hence are rivals for her affections. Strauss and his librettist, the conductor Clemens Krauss, consciously chose late-18th century Paris as the setting, since the opera's concept was based on a historical situation at that time, when an argument had raged about the supremacy of music or words (*Prima la musica e poi le parole*) centred around the operas of Christoph Willibald Gluck. It was a controversy that obsessed lovers of the arts of the day.

The sextet (which in the opera house is played by the first desk string players) begins the drama before the curtain rises. In a brilliant theatrical conceit, once the stage is revealed, the audience learns that it is the latest composition of Flamand, and as the sextet's music continues to be played in another room, he watches the Countess intently to see how she reacts to his work. Tantalizingly, the end of the opera, leaves both the argument and the Countess' decision about which lover to choose unresolved.

The opera's musical idiom is in Strauss' late manner and is a cousin of his mellifluous Oboe Concerto. It's full of tonal warmth with chromaticism judiciously used for dramatic purposes. As the great British writer on Strauss, Michael Kennedy, aptly commented, '*Capriccio* is Strauss' "most enchanting opera", the music of the *Sextet*, wonderfully supporting his claim.

Andrew Burn



String Quartet, 'American'

Antonín Dvořák

Born: 9 September 1841 Nelahozeves, Bohemia,

Died: 1 May 1904 Prague

1. Allegro ma non troppo
2. Lento
3. Molto vivace
4. Finale: Vivace ma non troppo

During June 1893 Dvořák visited the Czech farming settlement at Spillville, Iowa, where he composed his F major String Quartet, his opus 96. It received its premiere on New Year's Day 1894 at Boston, by the Kneisel Quartet.

In 1885 Mrs Jeanette Thurber founded the National Conservatory of Music in New York. To guarantee the success of her project she needed to acquire a figure of international standing to become its Director, and thereby stimulate the new generation of American composers. Her first approach to Dvořák was declined, but he accepted the better terms of her second offer, and set out with his family in September 1892.

The F major Quartet's title, *The American*, reflects not only the place of its creation but the composer's careful study of African-American folksongs. These he preferred to assimilate them into his own style and technique, in that most classical of genres, the string quartet. For in truth this work is as thoroughly characteristic of his Bohemian roots as his other chamber music.

The opening subject has an attractive contour which sets the work's genial tone. While there are several other distinctive melodies in this wonderfully lyrical movement, this first theme dominates, particularly in the classically conceived development section. The *Lento* exudes a deep nostalgia, perhaps reflecting Dvořák's response to his circumstances. The central section intensifies the mood, giving prominence to impassioned duets among the ensemble.

The third movement scherzo is full of rhythmic subtleties. The interplay of longer against shorter note values, the contrasts brought by augmentations and diminutions, are abundant in their complexities, yet the music still sounds spontaneous. This is perfectly contrasted against the central trio with its delightful counter-melodies.

The finale is a lively rondo, with a distinctive and dance-like principal theme which confirms the outlook of the whole composition. However, the movement has variety too, especially in the central episode which has the nature of a chorale, a veritable hymn of thanksgiving.

Terry Barfoot

Interval



Divertimento in D Major, K.136

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: 27 January 1756 Salzburg

Died: 5 December 1791 Vienna

1. Allegro
2. Andante
3. Presto

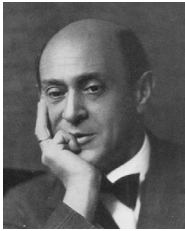
Mozart's prodigality was such that even his youthful compositions hold their rightful place in the repertory today. His boyhood travels with his father took him the length and breadth of musical Europe and gave him an education the like of which no composer before or since has known, and his talents allowed him to assimilate the styles with which he came into contact. This ability to creatively emulate can find no better illustration than the three delightful Divertimenti for strings (K136-8) which he wrote in Salzburg early in 1772.

These pieces can be played by an orchestral ensemble or by a string quartet, and the term Divertimento is not strictly appropriate, since it usually signifies an 'entertainment' piece containing a pair of minuets. In reality they are symphonies for string ensemble; and here Mozart was adopting a practice which was frequently found elsewhere. For example, it was followed by Johann Stamitz at Mannheim and by C.P.E. Bach at Hamburg.

It is not clear why Mozart wrote his *Divertimenti* (symphonies), and two theories have been advanced: that he intended them to play a part in the celebrations in April 1772 surrounding the enthronement of Hieronymous Colloredo as Archbishop of Salzburg, or that he intended to take them that autumn on his tour of Italy. The work was first performed at Salzburg in March or April 1772, directed by either Mozart or Antonio Brunetti, the leader of the Salzburg orchestra.

This divertimento tends to allocate the melodic interest to the first violin line, and though there is no lack of rhythmic activity, dramatic tension is never attempted. The opening *Allegro* treats the two violins antiphonally, and there are two themes of distinctive character. The central *Andante* is at once charming and more serious, its beautiful melody accompanied with the most subtle of figurations, while the finale is a lively movement contrasting staccato and legato phrases amid more complex textures.

Terry Barfoot



Verklärte Nacht

Arnold Schoenberg

Born: 13 September 1874 Vienna

Died: 13 July 1951 Los Angeles

A seminal 20th century composer, Schoenberg was taught composition by Zemlinsky, and received encouragement from Mahler. From the outset his works caused controversy as he moved rapidly away from a late-Romantic idiom, for example, *Gurrelieder* (1900-1901), to music that pushed tonality to its limits, eventually reaching so-called atonality as in *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912). By the beginning of the 1920s Schoenberg had formulated his twelve tone or serial composition technique, first manifested in the *Five Piano Pieces*, op.23 (1920-23). Other important works include the *Variations for Orchestra* (1926-28), the opera *Moses und Aron* (1930-32) and the *String Trio* (1946). After the Nazis gained power, he moved to the USA where he held academic positions (his pupils included John Cage), and enjoyed playing tennis with Gershwin, whom he regarded as a genius. The last word he uttered on his deathbed was 'harmony'.

Verklärte Nacht ('Transfigured Night'), Schoenberg's op.4, was composed in a white heat of inspiration in three weeks in 1899. Originally for string sextet, he later scored it for string orchestra.

The work, a tone poem in reality, takes its title from a poem within Richard Dehmel's collection *Wein und Welt* ('*Women and World*'). Two lovers wander through the winter cold of a moonlit forest. She confesses that she's pregnant by another man, since she believed that before meeting him she would find fulfilment through motherhood. The man, exulted by the beauty of the natural world around them, replies that their love will transcend everything, making the child beloved by them both. They kiss and walk purposefully onwards.

Zemlinsky was so impressed by the work that he submitted it to the Vienna Tonkünstler-Verein for consideration for performance. However, it did not find favour; in particular Schoenberg's inclusion of a 'single uncatalogued dissonance' caused outrage and consequently its rejection.

The criticism continued; after a private play-through in 1900, the operetta composer Richard Hueberger commented sarcastically, "It sounds as if someone had smeared the score of *Tristan* while it was still wet". *Verklärte Nacht* finally received its first performed in the original version in March 1902, amidst some hissing.

Schoenberg builds a substantial single movement by following the verse structure of the poem and the twists and turns of the text by the transformation of thematic material that mirrors every nuance of Dehmel's words. The music inhabits the very essence of the poetry, from the heavy steps of the anxious woman at the opening, to the sublime radiance of the coda as the lovers walk deeper into the forest through the 'high, bright night.'

Andrew Burn

Verklärte Nacht

Zwei Menschen gehn durch kahlen, kalten Hain;
der Mond läuft mit, sie schau'n hinein.
Der Mond läuft über hohe Eichen;
kein Wölkchen trübt das Himmelslicht,
in das die schwarzen Zacken reichen.
Die Stimme eines Weibes spricht:

"Ich trag ein Kind, und nit von Dir,
ich geh in Sünde neben Dir.
Ich hab mich schwer an mir vergangen.
Ich glaubte nicht mehr an ein Glück
und hatte doch ein schwer Verlangen
nach Lebensinhalt, nach Mutterglück

und Pflicht; da hab ich mich erfrecht,
da ließ ich schauernd mein Geschlecht
von einem fremden Mann umfängen,
und hab mich noch dafür gesegnet.
Nun hat das Leben sich gerächt:
nun bin ich Dir, o Dir, begegnet."

Sie geht mit ungelenkem Schritt.
Sie schaut empor; der Mond läuft mit.
Ihr dunkler Blick ertrinkt in Licht.
Die Stimme eines Mannes spricht:

Transfigured Night

Two people are walking through a bare, cold wood;
the moon keeps pace with them and draws their gaze.
The moon moves along above tall oak trees,
there is no wisp of cloud to obscure the radiance
to which the black, jagged tips reach up.
A woman's voice speaks:

"I am carrying a child, and not by you.
I am walking here with you in a state of sin.
I have offended grievously against myself.
I despaired of happiness,
and yet I still felt a grievous longing
for life's fullness, for a mother's joys

and duties; and so I sinned,
and so I yielded, shuddering, my sex
to the embrace of a stranger,
and even thought myself blessed.
Now life has taken its revenge,
and I have met you, met you."

She walks on, stumbling.
She looks up; the moon keeps pace.
Her dark gaze drowns in light.
A man's voice speaks:

“Das Kind, das Du empfangen hast,
sei Deiner Seele keine Last,
o sieh, wie klar das Weltall schimmert!
Es ist ein Glanz um alles her;
Du treibst mit mir auf kaltem Meer,
doch eine eigne Wärme flimmert
von Dir in mich, von mir in Dich.

Die wird das fremde Kind verklären,
Du wirst es mir, von mir gebären;
Du hast den Glanz in mich gebracht,
Du hast mich selbst zum Kind gemacht.”
Er faßt sie um die starken Hüften.
Ihr Atem küßt sich in den Lüften.
Zwei Menschen gehn durch hohe, helle
Nacht.

“Do not let the child you have conceived
be a burden on your soul.
Look, how brightly the universe shines!
Splendour falls on everything around,
you are voyaging with me on a cold sea,
but there is the glow of an inner warmth
from you in me, from me in you.

That warmth will transfigure the stranger's child,
and you bear it me, begot by me.
You have transfused me with splendour,
you have made a child of me.”
He puts an arm about her strong hips.
Their breath embraces in the air.
Two people walk on through the high, bright
night.

Richard Fedor Leopold Dehmel 1896
(18 November 1863 – 8 February 1920)



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