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Sunderland**

Jenkins, Hayley (2015) Gwyneth. [Composition] (Unpublished)

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inspiration, this String Trio was as an intimate and warmly affirmative statement, which despite initial opportunities for soliloquising, soon emerged as an eloquent celebration of the close rapport between its three protagonists.

Wilton's Music Hall was the atmospheric setting for the Kreutzer Quartet's world premiere of Holloway's String Quartet no.3 on 13 May 2015. Dedicated to Michael Tanner, this was a tightly argued piece consisting of several contrasting sections played without a break. Elements of rondo- and sonata-form were discernible in a heterogeneous score whose principal ideas unfolded in juxtaposition with various 'Episodes'. Marked *allegro molto*, the opening segment was taut and vigorous. It was set in motion by the viola and cello with the other instruments joining in as the material gained considerable momentum. In the wake of a weighty climax, the tempo relaxed and ushered in an elegant secondary idea. After a return of the opening material came a still and eerily quiet passage marked 'Episode I', very precisely calibrated with first violin playing near the bridge of the instrument, second violin near the fingerboard, viola articulating without *vibrato* and muted cello. Gradually, each of the instruments thawed out, shaking off their individual restrictions. Mirroring the configuration of the introductory bars, 'Episode II' began as an expressive dialogue for viola and cello before the texture opened out to accommodate all four players. 'Episode III' was a trenchant and weighty portion before the quartet's main material was developed further. After a delicately etched 'Episode IV' which duplicated the first Episode in its technical specifications, the work was allowed to gather significant impetus before the forceful and emphatic ending.

The Kreutzers surmounted the various challenges thrown down by Holloway's score, not least of which was to fashion a fluent, arc-like structure beyond its sundry idiosyncratic components. A powerfully persuasive logic was indisputably achieved in the fluent and exhilarating premiere performance.

Also featured in the programme was the UK premiere of David Matthews' *Fifteen Preludes* for solo violin. These finely etched vignettes are dedicated to the composer's friends and family, several

of them on the occasion of a significant birthday. Matthews' pieces shared a relaxed and convivial aura, despite the intricacy and technical difficulties of some of the writing, notably in the diverse articulation required for *The Tui's Song* for Rod Biss and the vertiginous harmonic fanfares in the piece for Robin Holloway on his 70th birthday. The Preludes varied in character from the eloquent simplicity of *A Little Pastoral* for Anthony Hopkins in his 90th birthday year to the graceful, free-flowing fantasy for Sally Cavender and the life-enhancing Sibelian grandeur of the miniature, marked *Andante festivo* for Matthew Taylor on his 50th birthday. *Fifteen Preludes* received an assured and deeply poetic reading by the Kreutzers' charismatic leader, Peter Sheppard Skærved, who showed great sensitivity in ensuring the individual character of each of the fifteen short and colourful studies was established as well as presenting a convincing overarching form.

In sum, the Kreutzer Quartet gave their audience another enterprising and exceptional concert. These players' inspired choice of repertoire is invariably matched by their accomplished and compelling presentation of the selected works and so it proved again on this memorable occasion.

York Late Music Concert:

Judith Weir, Sadie Harrison, Nicola LeFanu, Emily Howard, Charlotte Bray, Hayley Jenkins and Sally Beamish

Consisting of violinist Gemma Sharples, cellist Verity Evanson and pianist Pippa Harrison, the Albany Trio was founded in 2010. This lively and engaging ensemble has consistently championed the works of female composers, past and present, and their enthusiastic advocacy was reflected in an enterprising and rewarding programme presented as part of the Late Music Concert Series at the Unitarian Chapel in York on 6 June 2015.

The world premiere of Judith Weir's *O Viridissima* launched the concert. Written as a gift to the Late Music Series, this radiant miniature is a reworking of a monadic hymn by Hildegard of Bingen, which is present throughout the piece on one of the three instruments at the same time as being the subject of continual variation. Weir's magical economy of



Photo: Ashley Coombes

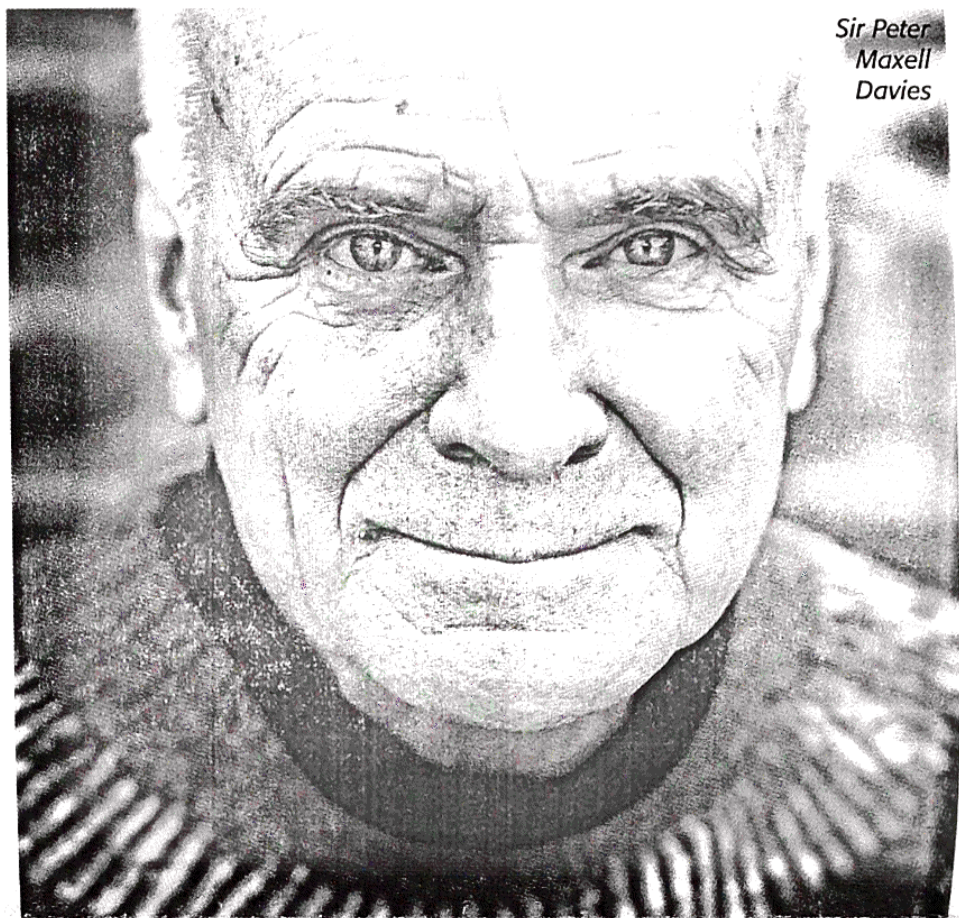
means was evident with perfectly judged sporadic single notes on the piano sufficient to conjure up a whole world of enchantment in the opening section. The reinterpretation by the present Master of the Queen's Music of material by one of the earliest known female composers in the Western world resulted in an exquisite curtain-raiser, meticulously and imaginatively rendered by the performers.

Sadie Harrison's *The Bride's Journey in Three Songs and a Memory* (2005) was inspired by the folk music of Lithuania and uses traditional songs relating to various stages in the life of a bride. Laced with flourishes and ornamentation, the score preserves and honours its source material with sensitivity and integrity of a high order. The players' poetic instincts were seized by the score's imagination and creativity, resulting in a reading of delicacy, precision and grace.

A superbly constructed single-movement span, Nicola LeFanu's Piano Trio of 2003 develops logically and grippingly the distinctive ideas presented in the opening bars. It proved the young performers' ability to tackle pure, non-programmatic music and demonstrated their natural feeling for formal proportion and balance. A substantial statement balancing refinement and toughness, LeFanu's Piano Trio made a weighty and satisfying centrepiece to the programme.

Emily Howard's *Broken Hierarchies II* is a reworking of a score originally written for seven cellos. In its incarnation for piano trio it gradually transformed from weighty but tentative interjections into a ▶

Sir Peter
Maxwell
Davies



sinuous melodic line of hard-won beauty. The Albany Trio had the full measure of Howard's variegated textures.

Charlotte Bray wrote *Those Secret Eyes* for the Albany Trio in 2014. Loosely based on events in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, this dark and unsettling vignette was inventively realised by the players who commissioned it. Whether taut and slippery, as in the initial stages, or icily calm before the central climax, the murky score's every shift of mood was faithfully and tellingly conveyed.

Hayley Jenkins' *Gwyneth 'The beginning of a long voyage'* was inspired by the diary entries of an 11-year-old girl describing her experiences as she was sent to Australia for safety at the outbreak of the Second World War. The apprehension and innocence of the narrator was beautifully caught in Jenkins' hesitant and warmly melodic phrases and the inclusion of quotations from the diary spoken by the players added an extra element of intimacy and engagement with the story. Receiving its first performance, Hayley Jenkins' new piece made a perfect showcase for the performers' ability to connect directly with their audience.

Rounding off the programme, Sally Beamish's fanfare-like *Carnival Samba* was a typically adroit miniature inspired by Schumann's *Carnival*. An aptly joyous reading brought the recital to a wittily satisfying finish.

It was a great pleasure to hear such fastidious musicianship placed entirely at the service of carefully chosen scores. The players displayed a close affinity with each other, resulting in a genuine sense of dialogue. Also in evidence was an invaluable ability to capture the individual personality of each of the composers (several of whom were present in the audience), realising their intentions with fidelity to the score and interpretative flair. The Albany Trio is an ensemble of the first order. The fact that these performers have such a fresh and exploratory attitude to building their repertoire is a substantial bonus.

Peter Maxwell Davies: String Quintet

Crowning the Nash Ensemble's 50th Anniversary season, a celebratory event entitled 'Nash Inventions' held at Wigmore Hall on 18 March featured the

world premieres of a String Quintet by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and the London premiere of a Piano Quintet by Richard Causton, as well as another chance to hear four other pieces commissioned in previous decades by the ensemble's director (and founder) Amelia Freedman.

Premiered in Cambridge by the Nash Ensemble in January 2015, Causton's new work is divided into two disparate sections of roughly equal length. In the first half, the three upper strings scurry through a sequence of common chords, whilst the piano and cello, remaining entirely divorced from the other instruments throughout, offer dark-toned *ostinati*-like utterances. The rift between the players is remedied in the second half, which presents a united ensemble in a still and icy soundscape haunted by eerie harmonics. A bold statement in a medium noted for organic development and symmetry of form, Causton's Piano Quintet makes a virtue out of its lack of homogeneity, contrasting starkly the animated disunity of the first movement with the bloodless, passive conformity of the second.

There was uniformity of a hard-won variety in Peter Maxwell Davies's String Quintet whose world premiere provided the highpoint of the concert. In my view

this composer is at his finest when stirred by extra-musical factors; his rage at the 2003 invasion of Iraq fuelled the passionate discourse of the Third Naxos Quartet, the most viscerally potent of his series of ten. His latest piece of chamber music was written in the aftermath of being treated for leukaemia and some of the pain, relief and joy of that experience has audibly contributed to a strikingly vivid and directly communicative score.

Davies's Quintet is written for two violins, viola and two cellos. There are four movements 'in the spirit of a Bach suite', as the composer suggested in his illuminating pre-concert talk. The piece is launched by an intricately worked out 'Chacony' of symphonic proportions and substance based on a double theme stated by the two cellos in the opening bars. The following 'Reel' is notable for its frenetic eruptions of folk-like ideas which intrude on recollections of the previous movement. At the core of the work is a solemn and searching 'Slow Air' of immense natural dignity and lyrical intensity. As it gradually unfolds, elements of the 'Chacony' and 'Reel' are invoked: the influence of Orkney folk music heard in its most blatant form in the preceding movement is transmuted here into something much more intimate and