

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

7 May 2017 – 4pm

Castalian Quartet

Sini Simonen – Violin | Daniel Roberts – Violin | Charlotte Bonneton – Viola | Christopher Graves - Cello

PROGRAMME NOTES *by Making Music*

HAYDN (1732-1809) : String Quartet in D major, Op. 76 No. 5

Allegretto – Largo:cantabile e mesto – Menuetto : allegro – Finale : presto

This genial, late-period quartet is one of six commissioned by, and dedicated to Count Joseph Erdody, himself a talented amateur chamber-music player.

In this master-crafted work there is no sign of the strain of ill-health, nor of any lack of inspiration, of both of which the composer was complaining at the time. Indeed, it would be hard to find, in the total of Haydn's 82 completed quartets, a more relaxed or lyrical opening movement than this lovely D major example. The principal subject is heard immediately on the first violin and captures the ear of the listener by its tenderness and simple charm. It is repeated on the same violin but with some ornamentation, in fact this movement is entirely dominated by this melody, for even when the music reaches into the darker world of the relative minor, the melody is easily recognised, as it appears first on the cello, and then on the second violin. This is a passage which develops some energy and which ends in a bar of suspended pause before the return of the major key and the opening subject material.

Lyricism is again the most striking feature of the beautiful slow movement, which sings its way in the remote key of F

sharp major. Most of the melodic material goes to the first violin, but there is interesting comment, and considerable interplay, from the other members. The key is difficult for string players because it produces its intervals with but scant respect for the open strings. The tension, which affects the players also affects the tonal quality of the sound and, in this example, gives the music an ethereal and spiritual quality.

The minuet is warm hearted and interesting in the use of cross-accents. Its trio section moves into the minor key and allows the cello more of a say.

The final movement, played fast and in 2/4 rhythm, takes the form of a rustic peasant dance with scarcely a letup in the pace and general high spirits. After a fanfare of opening bars, the first violin states the principal subject, or rather shares it with the cello, for they each have four bars. From then on the music flows in the most lighthearted way, as violin and cello enjoy melodic exchanges, and all four instruments revel through various key changes. Nothing more need be written when inspired music speaks its message so clearly as in this busy movement, and indeed, throughout the entire loveable work.

BRAHMS (1833-1897) : String quartet no. 3 in B flat, Op. 67

Vivace – Andante – Agitatio (Allegro non troppo) – Poco allegretto con variazioni

Brahm's previous two string quartets, published as a pair as Op. 51, had been strenuous minor-key affairs. In all probability their composition had been delayed and inhibited by the inevitable comparison with Beethoven's mighty corpus of 16 of them. This quartet, which Brahms told Joachim he liked better than the other two, is altogether sunnier. It was written in the summer of 1875 at what Brahms described to his publisher Simrock as a very pretty place, Ziegelhausen on the river Neckar, "fine minutes by train from Heidelberg, 30 minutes by skiff". To another admiring friend, the conductor Franz Wullner, he let slip the remark "I stay sitting here, and write from time to time highly useless pieces in order not to have to look into the stern face of a symphony". This was the *First Symphony* (with the opus number 68), another defiant struggle with the shade of Beethoven.

The first movement opens with an imitation of horn calls, but later this rhythm is mingled with the two-stamps-in-the-bar of Czech dances. Some of the transitions are made

by silences rather than notes, and happiness is the pervading mood. The slow movement is marked initially by balancing, regular phrases making for a serenity which is not regularly found in Brahms. On the other hand the middle modulates widely and the rhythms and phrase-lengths show more freedom. The reprise gradually recedes from this freedom, beginning in a foreign key and shedding its ornamental elaboration as it makes for home.

The third movement is very unusual in its layout, since it is led by the viola, the other three instruments being muted. The "trio" section does indeed begin as a trio with the viola omitted. But then, by a beautiful slight of compositional hand, what the trio have played becomes the background of yet another viola tune. There is a sly charm in the theme of the last movement's variations : its middle modulation is in an unexpected key, and its return to the home key is comically shortened. As the variations proceed a kinship to the horn-call subject begins to emerge, leading ultimately to an explicit combination of beginning and ending themes to wrap up the whole.

~~~~~ Interval ~~~~~

# Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

## BEETHOVEN (1770-1827) : String Quartet in E minor, Op. 59 no. 2

*Allegro – Molto adagio – Scherzo : allegro – Presto*

Composed in 1806, this is the second of the three quartets dedicated to Count Razumovsky, the Russian Ambassador in Vienna and a keen musician. The opening chords (“like the sharp cry of an anxious soul”, said the composer Vincent d’Indy) are followed by a quiet, questioning figure and a typical silence. This juxtaposition is a feature of middle and late-period Beethoven, and the miniature drama of the opening bars is expanded and developed in the course of the movement. The slow movement is serene, even devotional, at the start, but develops unease and never quite recovers its initial mood.

The scherzo, with its tricky syncopations, may puzzle some listeners for a few bars until they catch on to the beat. It is in this movement that Beethoven introduces the Russian theme, in deference to the Count, which is a feature of all three Razumovsky quartets.

The finale starts out of key in C major, like the Fourth Piano Concerto. The scheme is a combination of sonata and rondo forms. In this whirlwind there is little the listener can hang on to, but the three great passages that build up to the main reprises are useful anchor points.

### ARTIST BIOGRAPHY



Sini Simonen began to play the violin at the age of 4 and went on to study music in Helsinki, Hannover and Basel with among others Lara Lev and Krzysztof Wegrzyn.

She has won top prizes in several major international violin competitions including the Flesch, Lipizer, Cremona and Sibelius violin competitions. She has also won first prizes in the international Brahms and Citta di Pinerolo chamber music competitions.

In addition to the Castalian String quartet, Sini devotes her time to the love of chamber music as a violinist in the renowned Esbjerg Ensemble in Denmark, one of the few professional ensembles earning their year-round living from chamber music. Before moving to Denmark she was a member of the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra. She plays a Giovanni Battista Guaragnini violin from 1760 on loan from the Finnish Cultural Foundation.



Daniel Llewellyn Roberts studied with Nigel Murray and Jan Repko. He is a graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, holds Masters degrees from the Royal College of Music, London (as a Yehudi Menuhin Scholar), and the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien, Hannover, and has twice been a Leverhulme Chamber Music Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music, London.

Daniel is in demand as both a violin and chamber music teacher, holding positions at Birmingham Conservatoire and St. Paul’s Girls’ School, London, and giving masterclasses at St. Mary’s Music School, Edinburgh, and in various music schools and conservatoires in China.

He is a Yeoman of the Worshipful Company of Musicians and is extremely grateful to them for the loan of a fine violin by Joseph Guarneri filius Andrea of 1705.



Charlotte Bonneton studied in her native France at the Grenoble Conservatoire and the Schola Cantorum, Paris, and was awarded a full scholarship to study violin with Professor György Pauk at the Royal Academy of Music, London, where she obtained a Bachelor of Music with First Class Honours and a Master of Arts with Distinction. Whilst at the Royal Academy, Charlotte also studied viola with Matthew Souter.

As a concerto soloist, she has appeared with Orchestre National de Lorraine, Jyväskylä Sinfonia, Kazakh State Philharmonic Orchestra, Wrocław Chamber Orchestra Leopoldinum, Royal Academy String Orchestra and Royal Academy Concert Orchestra, performing works by Mozart, Mendelssohn, Saint-Saëns and Schnittke. Charlotte is dedicated to introducing audiences to new music and regularly collaborates with the London Contemporary Orchestra.



Christopher Graves studied the cello with Melissa Phelps at the Royal College of Music, and with Johannes Goritzki at the Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana. He also studied chamber music with Oliver Wille at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien, Hannover. His other teachers have included Bernard Greenhouse and Kate Beare. He was supported in his studies by scholarships from the Countess of Munster Musical Trust, the Musicians Benevolent Fund, and the Martin Musical Scholarship Fund.

Aside from his activities with the Castalian Quartet he has performed as a chamber musician at the Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall and Kings Place, and played at festivals such as the Kings Place, Heidelberg, and Middelburg festivals. As a soloist he has been heard on BBC Radio 3 playing in the BBC Proms Plus festival with an RCM chamber orchestra, and has given recitals widely in the UK and Europe.

He has played principal cello with orchestras such as Scottish Opera and Sinfonia Cymru, and other orchestras he has worked with include Philharmonia and London Chamber Orchestra.

**We hope that you will join us for our concerts in 2018: 8 and 22 April, and 6 May**