



Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club



Wednesday 10 May 2017 at 7.30 pm
In the Haldane Room, University College, Gower Street, WC1E 6BT

Concert No 2184

Open Concert

Silent Worship

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
arranged by Arthur Somerville (1863-1937)

Der Sieg (Mayrhofer)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Ombra di mia prosapia (Alvise's aria from La Gioconda)

Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-1886)

John Suddaby (*bass*) Nicholas Murray (*piano*)

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1932)

Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

David Gaster (*violin*) Anna Le Hair (*piano*)

Missa Brevis

James MacMillan (1959-)

OCMC Choir

Lyn Parkyns, Rebecca Hickey*, Rachel Goodkin (*sopranos*)

Philippa Winstanley, Norman Parkyns, Vivien Price (*altos*)

Travis Winstanley*, Alan Reddish, Charles Aitken (*tenors*)

Michael Crowe, David Banbury, Julian Brockless (*basses*)

Conductor: Alan Bowman

~ ~ ~ INTERVAL ~ ~ ~

Songs on river themes

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Wohin? (Die Schöne Muellerin)

Auf dem Flusse (Winterreise)

Liebesbotschaft (Schwanengesang)

Michael Crowe (*bass*) Martin Sharpe (*piano*)

Five Sarcasms Op. 17

Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Isaac Barry (*piano*)

Ombra di nube

Licinio Refice (1883-1954)

Ya mis horas felices (La del soto del Parral)

Reveriano Soutullo (1880-1932)

and Juan Vert (1890-1931)

Come un bel dì di maggio (Andrea Chenier)

Umberto Giordano (1867-1948)

Patrick Howard (*tenor*) Chris Underhill (*piano*)

Blow Up (2008) - UK PREMIÈRE

Karol Beffa (1973-)

Anna Bell (*flute*) Angela Escott (*oboe*) Andrew Smith (*clarinet*)

Hugh Rosenbaum (*bassoon*) Mark Zarb-Adami** (*piano*)

*guest **new member

Organiser: Graham Bowler

Recordings may be made, but only with the prior permission of the performers

Sonata (1932)

Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

“Frank Bridge is known almost entirely by his early works such as the Piano Quartet Phantasy. To those who know only this period of his work, the later pieces must seem like those of another composer. The earlier works are tonal and harmonically direct; the melodies clear and strong; the rhythm if not square, then rather regular. The later works have no clear keys, the melodies have a curious conversation-like character; the rhythms are usually irregular, and definite rhythmic patterns are rare. But to those familiar with all his works the connection between the two periods is clear – the seed of the later work is in the earlier – stemming from a desire to say more personal and subtler things. They can be difficult at first to follow, apart of course from the invariable fascination of the sound; the conversational melodies can be difficult to recognise, but the drama and tensions easy to feel” – Benjamin Britten, [from the 1955 Aldburgh Festival Programme Book]

The Violin Sonata of 1932 is a splendid example of Bridge’s late work incorporating bitter-sweet lyricism, a conversational style and capricious mood swings. Yet it borrows its form from many of his earlier works, such as the above-mentioned Phantasy. In common with these it is in a single movement; or more accurately, the movements run into each other without a break. This was the form Walter Wilson Cobbett stipulated for his composer’s competition, the idea being to pay homage to the fantasies and fancies for viols that flourished in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Crucially, the first movement returns as the finale, although considerably modified to bring the whole piece to a satisfying conclusion, fulfilling the same function as a much-delayed recapitulation in a classical sonata movement.

The work begins with an introduction containing two highly contrasted ideas: the first is jagged and violent, ending on an expectant chord introducing the second, much quieter and more sustained, but petering out into isolated offbeat notes and a general pause. During this introduction, a pedal E begins to assert itself, which turns out to be the dominant of the main key of the piece, A (major or minor). The main part of the movement then begins, the theme, steadier and more purposeful than the introduction, beginning firmly in A major, though harmonised by exotic chords underneath. After considerable working out of this theme and associated material, a gloriously lyrical “second subject” appears, first in the remote key of Db in the piano, then restated by the violin in D major, much closer to the main key of the piece, but “not quite there”. The warm, expressive mood does not last, however; the music seems to lose its way. Instead of a development section the slow movement begins tentatively in slow 6-8 time. The sonority is extraordinary; the piano starts alone, but with both hands in the treble, the chords weird and jangly due to inbuilt minor seconds. It is like a frozen landscape and the high chords are like ice crystals. When the violin comes in after a few bars with the melody it is *below* the piano, which continues with the jangly chords. I know of nothing like it in the whole of the violin and piano literature. Perhaps the violin is a solitary explorer trying to find their way in a vast arctic landscape. There is a moment of repose when the violin double-stops with the open G as a drone. What follows is even more extraordinary. Over just 4 bars the piano descends into the bass, during which the musical temperature rises from icy-frozen to fiery-red-hot. The explorer has arrived at the lip of a crater and looks down to see a huge volcanic furnace with lava bubbling away. The music intensifies even more: now the full range of the piano is used while the violin soars in the high treble, leading to a shattering climax with the violin reinforcing its line in octaves. What happens next? A silence – the explorer has imagined the whole scene! There is nothing left but sad solitariness – the violin enters alone and desolate. When the piano does eventually join in the mood calms and the movement draws to an eerily tranquil conclusion with the violin on a long high note *pianissimo*.

Suddenly the somnambulant mood is interrupted by a flourish from the piano and a *pizzicato* chord from the violin – and we’re off into the Scherzo. This is a *moto perpetuo* with continuous semiquavers in one or other of the instruments. The mood is mercurial, the music wiry and agile. The harmony is built out of fourths rather than the traditional thirds, giving a steely edge to the sound. There is a similarity to the scherzo section of the earlier string sextet,

also in duple time, and making prominent use of fourths and fifths to produce an open sound, although it is more traditionally tonal than the later work. Some way into the present movement a new theme appears in the piano in emphatic crotchets – followed by a more sustained, lyrical phrase from the violin. This is perhaps as near as the music gets to a traditional trio section – the semiquaver accompaniment is still more or less continuous. There follows a modified reprise of the first section, which comes rather abruptly to a juddering halt. The violin then harks back to the very opening of the first movement with the jagged theme, which leads into a *bravura* cadenza-like passage. This in turn introduces the last movement. Here, the material of the first movement is recapitulated, but the themes appear in a different order and are subtly changed. The glorious second subject reappears near the end, this time in the home key, A major. There is a real feeling of arriving, and there is a huge, passionate climax finally settling into a tranquil chord in A major with the violin holding a long C#. However, the tonal sands shift again underneath the long note, to be followed by a final appearance of the jagged opening theme and a fiery coda. The last word belongs to the two final *largamente* bars, with the violin emphatically picking out notes from the A minor scale followed by the very last note, a long unharmonized A from both instruments – the home key confirmed at last!

Programme note by David Gaster