



SUNDAY MAY 19th, 2024, 7.30pm
Clare Hall Dining Hall

THE FITZWILLIAM STRING QUARTET

Lucy Russell violin
Andrew Roberts violin
Alan George viola
Ursula Smith cello

Quartet in Residence and Fellow Commoners, Clare Hall Cambridge

with Patrick Hemmerlé piano

For their 2023/24 Clare Hall series the Fitzwilliam is featuring a guest in each concert: continuing the quartet's journey through the riches of the piano quintet repertoire, in the company of resident pianist Patrick Hemmerlé, this compelling partnership has been extended for the current season to feature quintets with viola and cello as well, plus a speaker to introduce each of the seven "sonatas" which constitute Joseph Haydn's extraordinary meditations on Christ's final utterances from the cross. The quartet has felt honoured to be welcomed so warmly into the family atmosphere of the College, and these new collaborations are intended to further that inclusive spirit by involving FSQ friends and colleagues.

Borderlands – Quartet No.5 (2024)

Liz Dilnot Johnson (b.1964)

Liz Dilnot Johnson gained her BA (Hons) in Music in the mid-80s, but having worked as a Primary class teacher for the next eleven years she took a "gap" year to study composition seriously for the first time, achieving an MA with distinction in 1999 from Birmingham Conservatoire. During that year she won a number of composition prizes and so decided to continue composing full time, continuing her studies towards a PhD with Philip Cashian. Since then her music has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and received performances all over the world. Her chamber works form a principal body of her oeuvre, alongside choral and vocal pieces, opera, and orchestral music. Liz was the featured composer in the 2003/4 Bromsgrove (Worcestershire) Mixing Music contemporary series, for which her third string quartet *Intricate Web* was commissioned, receiving its première by the Fitzwilliam on 10th Dec 2003 – and was later selected by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies for the opening celebrations at King's Place in London, played by the Brodsky Quartet. Since then she has composed many further pieces for the FSQ and its individual members – in 2017 they made a CD of all her chamber music with strings to date. This also included a new clarinet quintet, which explores the world of David Hart's poem *Crag Inspector*. *Wild Man Dances* for two pianos received its première soon afterwards. She is currently composer-in-residence with Jeffrey Skidmore's *Ex Cathedra*, and they have just released a new disc of her choral works. Recent commissions, as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations, culminated last year in *When A Child Is A Witness – Requiem For Refugees*, premièred in Coventry Cathedral on 26 February, with children's choir and refugee groups, "bringing together in a most radiant manner.....a diverse body of music (and speech), so that all enhance one another" (Church Times). Her film collaboration with Blue Efrath, setting words by Greta Thunberg: *Can You Hear Me?* for baroque violin with whispering choir, is just one of a number of works written for Lucy Russell – including a major role in the Requiem.

She writes: As I was driving back across Offa's Dyke I saw the most extraordinary full moon, with a cloud stretching across the sky in the shape of a huge wing. It seemed to me like a dragon's wing,

and I realised then that this would in time be the starting point for a piece of music. Since that moment I was on the look-out for other 'dragons' in the land, sea or sky. My piece takes three of these imagined dragons – the 'moon dragon', an 'earth dragon' with a different pulsating grounded energy inspired by the imagined coils of a dragon around the top of the Malvern Hills, and a perpetual wave of 'sea dragons' with foamy spume lit up in early morning sunlight. These were the mythical starting points for the music, and they are combined with a wish to find some kind of peace in our troubled times, with so many Borderlands, both physical and mental, to cross and re-cross. *Borderlands* is my fifth string quartet and it is dedicated to Alan George, founder member of the Fitzwilliams, commissioned by the quartet with support from the Vaughan Williams Foundation. They gave its world première just over a fortnight ago, in Malvern.

Quartet No.4 in D major, Op.83 (1949)

(1906 – 75)

Allegretto-Andantino-Allegretto-Allegretto

Dmitri Shostakovich

The fourth quartet was written fully three years after No.3, so obviously it could not have been conceived out of the immediate aftermath of its mighty predecessor. Certainly it presents a totally different portrait of its composer: no tragedy or heroics, simply a work of exceptional beauty and lucidity in which Shostakovich allows his powers of melodic invention to flower in truly memorable fashion. Indeed, what is so striking – and almost revolutionary – about both this quartet and No.6 is the way they show their creator to be immune from the long prevalent conception of the String Quartet as an essentially serious and rigorously intellectual form. This would never have earned the approval of such earlier twentieth century composers of quartets as Schönberg and Bartók; but Shostakovich's willingness to bring a greater range and freedom to the medium was far seeing and far reaching. However, there need be no fears that he compromised his standards of craftsmanship in any way: in No.4 he explores the art of climax to structurally telling effect, so that three of the movements (the exception is the third) owe their pleasing shape to the natural process of the building and releasing of tension. Although the first movement opens in lyrical serenity its climax is upon us in little over twenty bars, then to be sustained for at least as many again before an equally well worked descent. This whole passage is made especially memorable by the maintaining of a tonic pedal throughout its entire length, the open D strings of the viola and cello being brought into play with impressive resourcefulness. Additionally, the Jewish associations of this and other works from the late 1940s can immediately be felt through the preponderance of the interval of a fourth, which dominates almost all of this first movement – "I think...that Jewish folk music has made a most powerful impression on me... It is multi-faceted. It is almost always laughter through tears...". None of these works – together with others composed after 1948 – were offered for public performance until after the death of Stalin in 1953: in January and February 1948 a series of conferences was held, led by Party Cultural supremo Andrei Zhdanov, which amounted to a purge on the leading Soviet composers of the day. Included among them were Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, Khatchaturian, and Shostakovich himself – a particularly sorry event which could only bring discredit to all responsible.

Climax of a more theatrical and impassioned nature is the focus of the Andantino, a quasi-sarabande in F minor – elegiac but faintly waltz-like – which provides the emotional heart of the work. After this the atmospheric scherzo brings a touch of genuine fun; instrumental colour is exploited subtly and imaginatively, always featuring the shadier hues made available by mutes (kept on from the end of the previous movement). There is also an underlying rhythmic activity which maintains the music's direction, and in addition contributes a faintly Eastern flavour very much in keeping with the Jewishness of the outer movements. The viola eventually comes to rest on a long C harmonic, out of which is intoned a melody which a fanciful imagination might attribute to a gnarled old Oriental, seated cross-legged before a coil of rope! The climax period in this finale is the most extended of all, and is sustained by a density of orchestration whose effectiveness did not

go unheeded in Shostakovich's next quartet. Indeed, one cannot in the end escape the impression that this thoroughly warm hearted piece of music must be a work of considerable stature – an impression which has on some occasions been diminished when the metronome marks (over which the composer took such care) have not been properly absorbed. As will be seen in the present performance, they are particularly important here as they give a clue to the character of each movement where the tempo designations themselves offer little distinction: for instance, the finale turns out to be a much slower, bigger, and more powerful piece than might have been anticipated, so that the shape of the quartet as a whole is firmly directed towards this heavy footed dance. Once the dreamy tranquility of the Andantino has eventually been re-captured, we can be left in little doubt as to the predominant mood of this music, when it speaks to us so simply and directly. The popularity of No.4 in Russia, where for many years it was one of the most frequently played of the Shostakovich quartets, is as understandable as its former neglect in the West was incomprehensible.

INTERVAL

Piano Quintet in A major, Op 81

Antonín Dvořák
(1841 – 1904)

Allegro ma non tanto

Dumka:- Andante con moto – Vivace – Tempo I

Scherzo (Furiant):- Molto vivace

Finale:- Allegro

For many music lovers the true personality of Antonín Dvořák is enshrined less in his large scale symphonic works, but rather in those where either he allows his deep rooted Czech temperament to come to the fore (as with the famous Slavonic Dances), or in certain more intimate chamber works which even betray a whiff of the homespun. Into the latter category would be placed the wonderful Bagatelles (Maličkosti), Op.47, for the decidedly homely combination of two violins, cello, and harmonium; or *Cypřiše* (Cypresses), for string quartet. But what of the full scale chamber works themselves? Interestingly, they appear to fulfil different rôles at different times of his life: some of the earliest quartets are huge, ambitiously symphonic, lasting up to an hour! By the time he came to write this Op.81 piano quintet he had completed at least a dozen of them, yet had not attempted one for six years, since Op.61 of 1881. Similarly, although having composed three piano trios, plus a piano quintet and quartet, by the same year, it was not until 1888 that he once more put his great experience in these forms to practical but triumphant use in the production of another piano quintet – again, in the bright and optimistic key of A major. Whilst the inevitable influence of his great friend Brahms is often to the fore, and in particular the massive sonorities achieved in his own F minor quintet from 1864, it transpires that the terse, angst-ridden tone of much of that work is less in evidence than the sunny, life-enhancing spirit which pervades another piano quintet, from 22 years further back: that of Brahms's great mentor Robert Schumann. Indeed, no chamber work can ever have opened in more gloriously lyrical mood than Dvořák's quintet, setting off as it does with the cello launching straight into one of the composer's most unforgettable melodies.

Yet – as with the Schumann – the effervescence is temporarily suspended for the second movement, and a gloomy melody whose march-like tread strikingly recalls the harmonic darkness of its apparent model. This in fact proves to be the first of two essentially Slavonic “dances” which form the centre of Dvořák's grand conception: the Dumka actually originated in the Ukraine, and was a kind of folk-ballad whose striking contrast between elegiac lament and wild gaiety found creative response way beyond the Czech lands and into Poland and Russia – where it was taken up by Tchaikovsky, amongst others. The Dumka was often paired with another national dance, the

Furiant – no stranger at this point in Dvořák's symphonic and chamber works, yet on this occasion dispensing with the usual hemiola triple-time rhythms. Finally, a high spirited Allegro whose moto perpetuo motif, even when subjected to the somewhat more academic rigour of fugue, never quite gives up its sparkle.

1888 was to prove a significant year for Dvořák, not only on account of the composition of this marvellous quintet and work on his opera *Jakobín*: there were also important concerts for him in Budapest and Dresden, but February and November saw visits to Prague by none other than Tchaikovsky. The two composers struck up a genuine friendship, resulting in a major trip to Russia in March 1890. London – and the eighth symphony – followed quickly after the Russian adventure, before this increasingly international musician's travels culminated in 1892 with his long and well documented stay in the USA, where he composed his most famous work, the symphony *From the New World*. As he said himself, "The influence of America can be felt by anyone who has 'a nose'". Yet the pentatonic scale, which we think of as being so characteristic of native American music, happens to be no less vital an ingredient of Bohemian folk melodies: listen to the joyful tumbling unisons at the end of this exuberant quintet! Even at the height of Dvořák's fame the extent of its popularity would likely have come as something of a surprise to this humble and home-loving gentleman.

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The original members of the *FSQ* first sat down together, at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge, in October 1968 – as undergraduates during their inaugural term. Their first concert appearance took place in Churchill College the following March, ahead of their public debut at the Sheffield Arts Festival in June – making the Fitzwilliam now one of the longest established string quartets in the world, and almost unique in having passed a half-century with an original player still on board (but latterly joined by the Chilingirian, Brodsky, and Coull Quartets – with our congratulations!). The present line-up combines founding member Alan George with a younger generation of performers: violinists Lucy Russell (herself celebrating 35 years in the group) and Andrew Roberts (son of the great pianist Bernard), along with former Zehetmair Quartet cellist Ursula Smith – who has also led a highly distinguished career as principal cello in various groups, including the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

International recognition came early for the *FSQ*, as the first group to record and perform all fifteen Shostakovich string quartets, drawing on the players' personal connection with the composer: he travelled to York to hear their performance of his thirteenth quartet, and this musical friendship (the composer's own word!) prospered through correspondence, and the presentation of his final two quartets – written in the years immediately following that visit. Sadly, a carefully planned trip to spend a week with him in Moscow was necessarily abandoned, following his death in August 1975. Benjamin Britten afterwards reported that his friend had told him the Fitzwilliam were his "preferred performers of my quartets"! Complete cycles were given in a number of major centres, including London, New York, and Montréal. A new recording of the last three quartets was specially released by Linn in October 2019, to celebrate "*FSQ@50*" year. Whilst their pre-eminence in the interpretation of Shostakovich has persisted, the authority gained has been put at the service of diverse other composers spanning six centuries, from the mid-16th to the present day.

The quartet has appeared regularly across the UK, Europe, North America, the Middle and Far East, and Southern Africa, as well as making many award winning recordings for Decca, Linn, and Divine Art. A long-term ambition to record Beethoven and Schubert on gut strings – following the success of previous discs on historical instruments – was finally initiated during their 50th anniversary season, with recordings of Schubert's last four quartets; Beethoven's Opp. 131 and 135 went under the red light in March! Thus does the Fitzwilliam remain one of the few prominent

quartets to play on older set-ups, yet simultaneously bringing about the addition of over 60 new works to the repertoire – as can be heard on perhaps their most novel disc so far: a jazz-fusion collaboration with German saxophonist/composer Uwe Steinmetz and former Turtle Island Quartet violinist Mads Tolling.

After graduating from Cambridge in 1971 they immediately embarked on their first professional appointment, succeeding the celebrated Amadeus Quartet at the University of York. From there, the group built a niche for itself in concert venues around Yorkshire and the rest of the UK, at the same time joining a select company of aspiring quartets to have emerged under the guidance of Sidney Griller at the Royal Academy of Music. Having been Quartet-in-Residence at York for twelve years, at Warwick for three, at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge from 1998 to 2020, and at Bucknell (Pennsylvania, USA) since 1978, their university work now continues at Clare Hall Cambridge and at St Andrews – where they have become increasingly involved in working with the University Opera (most recently *Pelléas* in 2022) and with the Chamber Orchestra last year in *Metamorphosen*, and Vivaldi/Villa-Lobos/Mozart this January/February. The quartet is very proud to have been granted its own annual chamber music festival in the famous “book town” of Hay-on-Wye – the 2024 event is entitled “Music and Friendship” and includes works which we hope will underline the Transformative Power of Music: there will be music by JS Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Samuel Barber, Dmitri Shostakovich, Alfred Schnittke, as well as collaborations with at least two contemporary composers. Do come along and join in the Friendship!
www.fitzwilliamquartet.com

Patrick Hemmerlé is one of Europe’s foremost and most enigmatic pianists. Refusing to follow musical traditional conventions, he has forged a unique path in the musical world which leaves him free to immerse himself with singular dedication into the repertoire and musical expression resonating with the profoundest convictions. The results are interpretations of startling insight and originality. By dauntlessly performing all 24 Chopin Etudes or 24 of Bach’s Preludes and Fugues in a single concert, as well as championing lesser-known composers he feels a deep affinity for, he has developed a reputation as an original with something out of the ordinary to say. A charismatic speaker, he is able to elucidate the musical concepts close to his heart with unapologetic candour in a manner that both mirrors and complements his piano playing. Not comfortable with compromise, he engages with his audience from the keyboard with an energy and integrity that leaves no-one in the room in doubt as to his musical intentions. French born and trained at the Conservatoire de Paris under Billy Edie, and laureate of many international piano competitions, he now lives in Cambridge, England, where he has built up a staunchly loyal following. He also performs all over the world and recent engagements have taken him to New York, Berlin, Paris, Vienna and Prague and China. He has published 5 CDs, and his latest recording project to be issued shortly, is a pairing of Bach’s Well Tempered Clavier and Fischer’s *Ariadne Musica*. Patrick is a member of Clare Hall, where he is in charge of the concert programme.

Forthcoming concerts:

-June 16th: Mélanie Clapis, violin, Patrick Hemmerlé, piano
Violin Sonatas by Franck and Enescu

-June 29th: Grace Davidson, soprano, Julian Perkins, harpsichord
Music by Dowland, Purcell, Haendel, Campion, Scarlatti