

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Michael Barenboim & West-Eastern Divan Ensemble

Saturday 11 November 2023, 7.30pm

Queen Elizabeth Hall

Classical music is an incredible, centuries-long story. As we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – share that story with the world today, we're creating as many ways for as many different people as possible to experience this wonderful art form.

Whether this is your first encounter with classical music or one of many, I'm absolutely thrilled that you're joining us for more powerful human experiences. Welcome to Classical Music: Autumn/Winter 2023/24.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Carter Figment IV for viola 3'

Mendelssohn String Quintet No.2 in B flat, Op.87 30'

Carter Au Quai for bassoon & viola 4'

Interval

Carter Duettone from 3 Duetti for violin & cello 4'

Beethoven Septet in E flat, Op.20 40'

Performers

West-Eastern Divan Ensemble

Michael Barenboim *director, violin, viola*

Hisham Khoury *violin*

Miriam Manasherov *viola*

Sindy Mohamed *viola*

Assif Binness *cello*

David Santos Luque *double bass*

Daniel Gurfinkel *clarinet*

Mor Biron *bassoon*

Ben Goldscheider *French horn*

This performance lasts approximately two hours with one 20-minute interval.

Elliott Carter (1908–2012)

Figment IV for viola (2007)

Elliott Carter was one of the most prominent figures among American modernist composers, his extraordinarily long career spanning a plethora of ongoing developments. Termed by Aaron Copland 'one of America's most distinguished creative artists in any field', and winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, he created a fount of intricately worked atonal music that ranges from poetic to angry and to witty.

This abstract three-minute work for solo viola dated from Carter's late burst of composition in his nineties. Written in 2007, it was premiered at the Freer Gallery, Washington DC,

in his 100th year, 2008. The performer was Samuel Rhodes, violist of the Juilliard Quartet, a treasured colleague of Carter's. 'All of my quartets profited greatly by his unflagging skills and interest', he noted.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

String Quintet No.2 in B flat, Op.87 (1845)

I. Allegro vivace

II. Andante scherzando

III. Adagio e lento

IV. Allegro molto vivace

The two string quintets virtually bookended Felix Mendelssohn's creative life, the first dating from 1826, when he was 17, and the B flat Quintet from 1845, written shortly before his oratorio *Elijah*. Aged 36, he was by then among the most internationally celebrated musicians of his day, although the pressures of his high-profile career were beginning to take their toll.

Mendelssohn, who was born in Hamburg and grew up in the elite cultural circles of Berlin, settled in Leipzig in 1835 upon becoming conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. There he met and married Cécile Jeanrenaud and became the father of a growing family. He founded a conservatoire in the city that developed into one of the most respected in Europe. He travelled a great deal, especially to Britain, where he was a favourite of Queen Victoria. In 1845 the Mendelssohns' fifth child, Lilli, was born, no doubt adding to his load of mingled joy and exhaustion. His students were finding him a tad short-tempered.

There's no sign in the Quintet, though, of anything less than Mendelssohn's streamlined exactitude and virtually aerodynamic energy. The first movement plunges straight in with a propulsive, optimistic first violin theme. Mendelssohn is soon treating his ensemble as a mini-orchestra, with 'concertante' moments (smaller groups of instruments contrasting with larger tutti for all the players) – the violas lead the way in the gentler second subject, for instance – and he exploits the format's possibilities with a whirlwind of inventive textures.

The second movement mingles the lilting rhythm of a folk dance with a typically Mendelssohnian scherzo, haunted by a twilit

woodland magic. The slow movement is a hymnlike moment of reflection, but the central section lets darker hues into the work's hitherto little troubled musical journey. The finale, however, is as energetic and busy as Mendelssohn himself.

Elliott Carter

Au Quai for bassoon and viola (2002)

The key (quai?) to this quirky little piece is in the name. Carter, aged 93 and not short of a twinkle in the eye, provided a brief programme note:

The title of this piece was suggested by Arnold Schoenberg's short story 'To the Wharfs' in which he describes the mounting anxiety of the members of a French fishing village as the boats and the sea-bound fisherman failed to appear after a storm and several days' absence. When they were suddenly sighted all shouted 'to the wharfs, aux quais, O.K.'

Incidentally, there's little evidence of Schoenberg having written any such story...

Matching two underrated, tenor-range instruments, the duet was first performed in the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 12 June 2002, by two members of the London Sinfonietta.

Elliott Carter

Duettone from 3 Duetti for violin & cello (2009)

Despite the title, playing on the Italian suffix '-one', indicating 'big', this duo is concise, concentrated and well-balanced, the two instruments treated with complete equality and commensurate brilliance. It is dated 2009, and is one of very few works ever written by a centenarian composer.

Carter dedicated *Duettone* to his good friend and fellow composer Milton Babbitt and created it, as he said, 'for those wonderful instrumentalists Rolf Schulte and Fred Sherry, who had asked me many times to write for their instruments'.

Find out more

- ▶ Michael Barenboim
- ▶ West-Eastern Divan Ensemble
- ▶ southbankcentre.co.uk

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Septet in E flat, Op.20 (1799–1800)

- I. Adagio – Allegro con brio*
- II. Adagio cantabile*
- III. Tempo di menuetto*
- IV. Thema con variazioni. Andante*
- V. Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace*
- VI. Andante con moto alla marcia – Presto*

The wildfire popularity of Beethoven's Septet helped to endear the 29-year-old composer to the great and good of Vienna. It draws on – and exceeds – the tradition of serenades and divertimenti that the late 18th-century aristocracy enjoyed. Its admirers included the wife of Emperor Franz II, Empress Maria Theresia, to whom it is dedicated. No wonder that by then, Beethoven was being hailed as the successor to Mozart.

This young lion of a composer had moved to Vienna from Bonn in 1792 to study with Joseph Haydn and was now enjoying a love-hate relationship with the city and its inhabitants. He was ambitious yet rebellious, sociable yet regarded by the aristocrats as uncouth: he disliked formal dress and was seemingly incapable of punctuality. Though dependent on patronage, he was determined to be a self-made artist, and his talent and joie de vivre could still balance, mostly, his notoriously hot temper. He had not yet faced up to troubling symptoms that would soon worsen into incurable deafness.

The Septet was premiered in an 'Akademie' concert that Beethoven staged at the Burgtheater on 2 April 1800. Its instrumentation was creative: the serenades of the past had usually involved pairs of wind instruments, rather than one apiece. Instead, Beethoven balances violin, viola and cello with three woodwind, everything underpinned by the double bass. The piece is written to the individual strengths of each instrument, besides their collegiality; and with its high spirits and punchy motifs it achieved instant and lasting success.

The first movement is an upbeat allegro with a slow introduction. There follows a lyrical slow movement in which the clarinet is a persuasive singer; an earthy minuet; a theme and variations based on a Rhenish song called 'Ach Schiffer, lieber Schiffer' (Ah boatman, dear boatman), perhaps a tribute to Beethoven's native Bonn; a bouncy scherzo ushered in by a horn call; and, after a sombre introduction, an irrepressible finale. This light, bright, sociable Beethoven is all the more valuable given what came later: different, but equally crucial.

Programme notes © Jessica Duchon, 2023

You might also like...

The Bevan Family Consort

Sunday 26 November 2023, 7pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall

Soprano sisters Mary and Sophie Bevan appear as part of the consort, reviving the age-old tradition of family singing in a performance of sacred choral works.