



ACADEMY

of ST MARTIN
IN THE FIELDS

Monday 5 July 2021, 7.30pm

Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble

Sally Beamish Partita (UK Premiere)

Felix Mendelssohn Octet in E flat major, Op.20

Violin

Tomo Keller
Harvey de Souza
Martin Burgess
Jennifer Godson

Viola

Robert Smissen
Fiona Bonds

Cello

Will Schofield
Juliet Welchman

Sally Beamish (b.1956) **Partita**

- I. Prelude
- II. Fugue
- III. Chaconne

'In March 2019 I was a juror at the Carl Nielsen Violin Competition. I heard many superb performances of the Bach solo sonatas and partitas, and for 10 days, my head was filled with Bach. Felix Mendelssohn was strongly influenced by Bach and Handel, and this is evident in his brilliant octet. I have taken the idea of a partita, which is traditionally a suite for a solo instrument. A string octet could be seen as a single entity - almost like a bowed keyboard - as well as being an ensemble of soloists.

The Prelude takes a fragment from the prelude to Bach's D minor Sonata for solo violin, and weaves it into an ostinato, initially on 1st viola. This begins to fragment and break apart, reaching a climax which converges onto a single note.

The Fugue is based on the Handel quote (from the Messiah) which forms a fugato in the last movement of Mendelssohn's Octet. I have used it as a slow theme. The fugue is in 8 parts. The Chaconne takes a Mendelssohn theme, which is heavily disguised. After a fanfare-like opening, stated on lower strings, there are eight chaconne variations, each featuring a different member of the octet. The solos range from wistful to playful - the last soloist being the first viola, with an attempt to reveal the identity of the hidden theme.

Partita was commissioned by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. It is one of two works written during my residency with the Academy; the other being 'Hover' for chamber orchestra.

It is dedicated with love to my husband, Peter Thomson, and also inspired by the unique, virtuosic dynamic of these musicians, whose playing I know so well. The world premiere was given by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble, at the River Centre for the Performing Arts in Columbus, Georgia, USA, on 4th October 2019.'

Programme note by Sally Beamish

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) **Octet in E flat major, Op.20**

- I. Allegro moderato, ma con fuoco
- II. Andante
- III. Scherzo (Allegro leggierissimo)
- IV. Presto

Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg in 1809 into a wealthy banking family and enjoyed an education encompassing many subjects taking piano lessons whilst his family were in Paris in 1816. He returned to Berlin and made his debut as a pianist at the age of nine and began to compose prolifically for various instruments and voices. The Octet was written when he was sixteen and begins with a magnificent first movement with a soaring opening theme on the first violin with a shimmering semiquaver accompaniment and syncopations. The second subject is a much calmer beautiful melody which passes through various instruments before returning to the turbulent con fuoco first subject. The first movement is a delight to play for all instruments but particularly features a wonderful solo for the fourth violin in the second half which then sets up the mood for the return to the first subject in snake-like semiquavers weaving us back into E flat major. The second movement is an Andante which has a haunting melody on cello and viola that quickly blossoms into a beautiful melody in the upper strings and then develops into a descending melody accompanied by a weaving triplet figure which then continues through the movement. We then have a miracle of a movement in the Scherzo which is mostly played pianissimo and echoes the atmosphere of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" finishing with a breathtaking scale on the first violin. The last movement is a Fugal Presto which passes from second cello to the top of the violins, and is more orchestral with many tutti passages and excerpts from the Scherzo finishing very triumphantly.

Programme note by the Academy's former Principal Cello, Stephen Orton

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