

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 12 April 2023  
7.30pm

## I Musicanti

Tamás András violin  
Benedict Holland violin  
Robert Smissen viola  
Richard Harwood cello  
Leon Bosch double bass  
Peter Donohoe piano

Louise Farrenc (1804-1875)

String Quintet Op. 38

*I. Adagio - Allegro • II. Andante con moto •  
III. Scherzo. Vivace • IV. Adagio - Allegro*

John McCabe (1939-2015)

Sam Variations (1989)

*This performance has been enabled by the Schubert Ensemble Trust*

Interval

John McCabe

Pueblo (1986)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Piano Quintet in A D667 'Trout' (1819)

*I. Allegro vivace • II. Andante •  
III. Scherzo. Presto • IV. Thema. Andantino - Allegretto •  
V. Finale. Allegro giusto*

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Despite being forbidden as a woman to study composition at the Paris Conservatory, **Louise Farrenc** found a few loopholes. In addition to studying privately with Anton Reicha, the Conservatory's broad-minded composition teacher, the former Jeanne-Louise Dumont also married Aristide Farrenc, a flautist (and her recital partner) who later left concert touring to become a prominent music publisher.

No less crucial to Farrenc's success as a composer, though, was her own aptitude at the piano, which earned her a prestigious Conservatory post. As the first woman to hold a permanent piano professorship, she was paid notably less than her male colleagues - that is, until she composed her Nonet in E flat Op. 38 (ironically, the first of her compositions not to include piano). Although the piece remained unpublished during her lifetime, its high-profile public première in 1850 at the Salle Érard - violinist Joseph Joachim performed in the ensemble - and universal acclaim thereafter made Farrenc a household name in the city's music salons and became her ticket to equal professional standing.

While her original instrumentation followed Spohr's model, a wind quintet balanced and countered by a string quartet, Farrenc later reworked her Op. 38 into a separate version for string quintet (two violins, viola, cello and double bass). No explanation or performance history for the revision survives, so we have only the indications on the page: a four-movement structure in fairly conventional tempos where block chords establish the tonal centre and syncopated rhythms season many chromatic passages.

As in Farrenc's original version, the violin often introduces new musical material, which is then tossed around the ensemble in various instrumental combinations. Replacing the timbral richness of the original, however, is an increased sonic focus where varied colours of the winds give way to a uniform wall of strings.

**John McCabe**, like both Farrenc and (as we will see) Schubert, has proved to be supremely ecologically conscious in his recycling of earlier works. After receiving a commission from London's Schubert Ensemble in the late 1980s, McCabe found inspiration not just in the ensemble's instrumentation but also their namesake composer's iconic work. Much as Schubert spun his *Lied* 'The Trout' into a set of variations in the fourth movement of his A major Piano Quintet, McCabe turned to the title music from the British television series *Sam*, which he had penned in the early 1970s.

McCabe's *Sam Variations* transforms not only the character of the original tune, with winds and brass gently dancing atop a jaunty string accompaniment, but also the music itself, not merely quoting the theme but using it as the foundation for a free series of continuous movements. The 'variations' unfold as a series of brisk character pieces, where the opening string gestures return (and continually evolve) as a palate-cleansing *ritornello*. The piece received its first performance in June 1989 here at Wigmore Hall.

*Pueblo* (1986) for solo double bass is part of McCabe's series of works inspired by desert country, in this case a

purely musical reaction to the scene depicted in the book *Scenes in America Deserta* by the architectural historian Reyner Banham:

Clouds, high and flat, were now building up in the sky, the wind was settling to silent calm, the weather was very cold, and the stream through the center of the pueblo was almost frozen across, the Indians chipping out ice to melt down for water.

The composer describes *Pueblo* as follows: 'The piece is continuous, falling into several sections, and is largely based on the high circling motif heard at the start and referred to again in harmonics at the close' *Pueblo* had its world première in 1990 at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester performed by Leon Bosch, who commissioned the work with funds provided by North West Arts and subsequently recorded it on the Meridian label.

Few works of chamber music have as charming an origin story as **Schubert's** Piano Quintet in A D667. The composer - then 22, still unpublished and paying the bills by teaching school and playing piano in Viennese salons - was invited by the operatic baritone Johann Michael Vogl (an admirer of Schubert's *Lieder*) to join him for a summer hike around his home village of Steyr, which had become something of an Alpine artist colony.

Schubert was a hit, particularly at the weekly gatherings sponsored by Sylvester Paumgartner, the town's musical patron and an amateur cellist himself. Paumgartner asked the young composer for a new work to play with his regular collaborators: a pianist and three other string players (a violinist, violist and double-bassist, the latter replacing the more usual second violin). Hummel had earlier rearranged one of his septets for the same five musicians.

In addition to the instrumentation, Paumgartner also requested that Schubert incorporate music from 'Die Forelle' ('The Trout'), which had become one of the patron's favourite *Lieder*. Both structurally and musically, Schubert's Quintet veers in new directions, its five movements (rather than the usual four) exploring the full sonic range of the added double bass. Musical themes and ideas cascade from all sides yet avoid the 10-car pileup that could result in lesser hands. By the time Schubert gets to 'The Trout' in the fourth movement, he doesn't merely quote the theme or (in the more classical sense) rework it into new melodic material but rather focuses on the harmonic backdrop, keeping the tune recognisable while dressing it in a variety of emotional shadings.

Schubert's Quintet was published in 1829, a year after the composer's death. As with many musical legends, accounts vary as to where and when the piece was actually written; but whether Schubert composed it amidst the elation in Steyr or in the early stages of nostalgia after returning to Vienna, few works in the chamber repertory capture so well the sheer infectious delight of collaborative music-making.

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