

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 17 December 2023
7.30pm

Ben Goldscheider horn
Callum Smart violin
Richard Uttley piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Horn Quintet in E flat K407 (1782) *arranged by Ernst Naumann*
I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Rondo. Allegro

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Trio for violin, horn and piano (1982)
I. Andantino con tenerezza •
II. Vivacissimo molto ritmico •
III. Alla marcia • IV. Lamento. Adagio

Interval

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

3 Romances Op. 22 (1853)
Romance in D flat • Romance in G minor •
Romance in B flat

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Horn Trio in E flat Op. 40 (1865)
I. Andante • II. Scherzo. Allegro •
III. Adagio mesto • IV. Finale. Allegro con brio

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Mozart wrote his Horn Quintet – and his four horn concertos too – specifically for Joseph Leutgeb (1732–1811), who had made his name in Vienna but in 1763 moved to a post at the court of the Prince-Archbishop in Salzburg. Here he became a colleague first of Mozart's father, Leopold, and then of the younger Mozart. Leutgeb moved back to Vienna in 1777, followed by Mozart four years later. Mozart wrote his Horn Quintet the year after his arrival in the Austrian capital, ribbing his longstanding horn-player friend in the Horn Quintet's dedication, which read: 'Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart takes pity on Leutgeb, donkey, ox and fool.'

The modern horn – in which the notes are altered by operating four valves – was still half a century away. The instrument of Mozart's time was the natural horn, or Waldhorn (hunting horn) – effectively a single tube with a mouthpiece and bell, whose available notes were restricted to those of the harmonic series. The technique of hand-stopping – inserting the cupped left hand into the bell and altering its position to vary the pitch – had been developed fairly recently and Leutgeb was an early exponent of it.

Written in 1782, only months after his marriage to the soprano Constanze Weber, Mozart's quintet (originally for horn, violin, two violas and cello) is modest in scope, though the part for horn is by far the most soloistic. After the amiable, compact first movement, the *Andante* reminds us of Leutgeb's fabled ability, noted by one reviewer, to 'sing ... as perfectly as the most mellow, interesting and accurate voice'. The spirited finale presents the biggest test of the horn player's abilities.

Mozart was among the last of the composers deemed acceptable for **György Ligeti** and his avant-garde contemporaries, until the arrival in the 20th Century of Bartók and Stravinsky. The intervening period of heart-on-sleeve Romanticism was looked upon with suspicion if not disdain. That, though, was the Ligeti of the 1960s and 1970s, the time of the complex textural 'micropolyphonic' works such as *Atmosphères*, *Lux aeterna* and the *Requiem*, which caught the ear of film director Stanley Kubrick, who co-opted them (as it happened, without permission) to evoke the future in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. By the time of his Horn Trio in 1982, Ligeti was seeking a new path.

The trio turned out to be a homage to Brahms, whose own Horn Trio Ligeti thought 'very, very beautiful'. Anyone expecting a connection with the Romantic idiom will be disappointed, though. While the opening movement is softly melancholic, the three instruments occupy almost exclusively independent strata. At the end, the horn fades to nothing and the violin disappears into the ether. The second movement follows without a break, inspired by a mish-mash of folk music, in the words of the composer, 'as if Hungary, Romania or the entire Balkans were placed somewhere between Africa and the Caribbean'. The third movement contrasts a stumbling march in its outer sections (the horn rudely joining in for the reprise) with a gracefully flowing

middle section. The final-movement *Lamento* is at first tragic but later becomes disturbingly unhinged, as the violin veers upwards, the horn plays distorting, 'out-of-tune' natural harmonics and the piano hammers ferociously. The end is a stunning vision that evaporates any perceived frame containing the music.

Pianist, composer, teacher and editor, **Clara Schumann** also spent six years of her life in pregnancy as the mother of eight children. Over 40 years she gave more than 200 concerts with the celebrated violinist Joseph Joachim, and it is to him (the man who introduced Brahms to the Schumanns, prompting another enduring friendship) that these *3 Romances* were dedicated.

The first is a longing, nocturnal song marked by a warm interweaving of the instruments. In the gently animated central section, Clara fashioned a passing motto from the opening five notes of Robert's first Violin Sonata (1851). The second *Romance* has the distinctive mix of innocence and eloquence characteristic of Robert's *Kinderszenen* ('Scenes from childhood', 1838), not least in the fresh-as-spring trilling and skipping of its central section. The final *Romance* is a more urgent song than the first, underpinned by fast-rushing ripples in the piano, attesting to Clara's pianistic ability. She and Joachim performed the *3 Romances* together often, including for George V of Hanover, who apparently declared himself to be 'completely ecstatic' with them.

Clara wrote to **Johannes Brahms** late in 1866 of a recent performance she gave in Leipzig of his new Horn Trio. She was impressed with the horn player – 'I do not think he spluttered once, and that says a great deal' – though she noted he played a 'Ventil-horn' (valved horn) as opposed to the natural horn specified by Brahms.

The Trio is unusual in its layout – two slowish movements alternating with two quicker, dance-like movements. The alternating pattern (as opposed to a conventional sonata form) also shapes the first movement. The sombre first section is based on an alphorn-like theme, its short-short-long rhythm adopting something of a mysterious tread. The contrasting section (marked *Poco più animato*) has a more flowing motion.

The following *Scherzo* opens (and concludes) with a hunting-horn type romp, its central section using the horn more melodically in a theme hard to separate from one used later by Edvard Grieg in the first movement of his Piano Concerto. The sorrowful slow movement is one of Brahms's most haunting and dramatic, its second theme (started by the horn) having an almost plainchant-like quality. But the unabashed solemnity is released in the spirited *Finale*, with its brisk hunting-horn figuration. In her recollection of her 1866 Leipzig performance, Clara Schumann noted this movement 'went as if fired from a pistol'.

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