

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 29 October 2021 7.30pm

JACK Quartet

Christopher Otto violin

Austin Wulliman violin

John Pickford Richards viola

Jay Campbell cello

Danny Driver piano



Supported by CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust

Rodericus

Angelorum psalat (c.1390-9) *arranged by Christopher Otto*

Amy Williams (b.1969)

Cineshape 2 (2007)

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

String Quartet No. 2 (1968)

I. Allegro nervoso • II. Sostenuto, molto calmo •

III. Come un meccanismo di precisione •

IV. Presto furioso, brutale, tumultuoso •

V. Allegro con delicatezza

Thomas Adès (b.1971)

Piano Quintet (2000)

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In his haunting study of an English country GP, *A Fortunate Man*, John Berger writes of the insatiable curiosity that drives some to cultivate a way of thinking that accepts no limits, beyond those imposed on the imagination by nature. **György Ligeti** owned that way of thinking and applied it to the creation of music that arguably goes deeper, forges more connections, captures a wider expressive range than any other body of compositions from the second half of the last century. The Hungarian composer, like Berger's friend Dr John Sassall, chose to stand apart, free from the demands of any single orthodoxy, open to ideas, practices and ancient wisdom all too readily dismissed as primitive or reactionary or simply ignored by the academy. Those and other qualities speak directly to Danny Driver, a fellow traveller in the curiosity department, whose love for Ligeti's music has only grown since he began studying his eighteen *Etudes* for solo piano a decade ago.

Driver's Ligeti Series at Wigmore Hall explores some of the strands of influence, connections and resonances that touched Ligeti's creative development as well as works by others. This evening's concert, the first of three, favours music that contains multiple facets and expresses many things. Ligeti's Second String Quartet projects a remarkable diversity of timbre, texture and motion across its five movements. The work, written in 1968, at the time of the so-called Prague Spring, the student riots in Paris and the assassination of Martin Luther King, contrasts the hard-edged, machine-like iterations of its first and third movements with the all-too-human lamentations and angry outbursts of the second. Movement four rises from silence with a menacing assault of homophonic chords, behind which stand distant echoes of the spirit if not the letter of the work's second movement. Ligeti's expansive final movement feels like the fully formed offspring of its predecessors, at times filled with dread and foreboding, at others marked by a serene beauty.

'Ligeti's music is accessible on so many levels,' comments Danny Driver. 'There's a certain universalism about it, which comes from his work not being too closely tied to any one tradition. He drew on his knowledge, love and expertise in music of the entire world. You can hear that most clearly in his three books of *Etudes* for solo piano, which I will perform in my final concert of the season. But in general he blows open the idea of a fixed musical tradition by exploring different traditions and spheres of influence, from mathematics and geometry to world musics and visual art. And there is a huge emotional range in his music: there's a lot of humour and there is darkness, tragedy and brutality, and there is everything in between.'

Ligeti's aesthetic – open to the past, the avant-garde and the postmodern yet in critical dialogue with each – embodied his response to the unyielding ideologies that brought the Holocaust and post-war Soviet oppression to Hungary. The son of a Jewish family, forced into a labour camp in 1944, his distrust of all hegemonic systems, whether political or cultural, owed much to the barbarities and injustices he witnessed before he fled Budapest for

Vienna in 1956. 'It's unsurprising that there's an alienation and withdrawal in Ligeti's work,' comments Danny Driver. 'At the same time, his music is so expressive and immediately touching. Each of his pieces has its own rules, inhabits its own world, which is what we see with great music of all periods.'

Like Ligeti, **Thomas Adès** has explored extreme rhythmic complexity and multi-layered textures in search of heightened musical expression. Adès's Piano Quintet, first performed in October 2001 with the composer as pianist, transforms the structure and recognisable thematic groups of a single sonata-like movement, complete with exposition, development and recapitulation (and even an exposition repeat), through the elaborate simultaneous interplay of diverse time signatures, 2/7, 3/5 and 4/6 among them. The work combines melodicism and fragmented tonal harmony with highly complex, independent rhythmic structures that seem to inhabit their own worlds while connecting with those around them. 'There's a wonderful sense of freedom in which time appears to expand and contract while being very loosely anchored to those points where things come together,' notes Danny Driver.

Metrical shifts and disjunctions are common to *Cineshape 2* and *Angelorum psalat*, works separated in historical time by more than six centuries yet close kindred spirits in their textural and temporal intricacies. In *Cineshape 2* (2007), the second in a series of five pieces inspired by films, the American composer and pianist **Amy Williams** takes her lead from Mike Figgis's *Timecode*, an experimental film constructed from four continuous 93-minute takes shot by four cameras. Williams's work evokes the interactions and conflicts that touch the film's large cast of characters as they prepare to shoot a movie in Los Angeles.

'In the piece,' notes Williams, 'there are highly diversified materials in the string instruments: aggressive multiple stops in the viola; a texture evocative of Renaissance music played by the muted viola and cello; a syncopated, choppy line divided among the two violins; impulsive and expressive cello solos; static, repeated chords that immediately die away.' The piano serves to bind together the work's continually changing 'musical characters' as they slowly reveal what they share in common.

Rodericus may have been a priest and musician in service to one of the Avignon popes. *Angelorum psalat*, his only surviving piece, is preserved in the Chantilly Codex, a compilation of pieces by mid to late 14th-century French composers in the complex rhythmic and notational style of the *Ars subtilior* ('more subtle art'). Rodericus's two-voice Latin *ballade* contrasts Eve's original sin with the celestial harmony of the spheres. JACK Quartet leader Christopher Otto's arrangement from 2011 introduces further layers of complexity with the addition of parts for second violin and cello 'to clarify the underlying grid of these complex rhythms'.

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