

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 7 March 2022 1.00pm

Simon Trpčeski piano

Gjorgi Dimchevski violin

Sorin Spasinovici viola

Alexander Somov cello

Hidan Mamudov clarinet

Vlatko Nushev percussion

BBC
RADIO



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor Op. 60 (1855-75)

*I. Allegro non troppo • II. Scherzo. Allegro •
III. Andante • IV. Finale. Allegro comodo*

Pande Shahov (b.1973)

Quintet for piano, clarinet, violin, cello and percussion (2021)

I. Igra • II. Monistra • III. Potok

Guillaume Connesson (b.1970)

Divertimento (1998 arr. 2021) *arranged by Vlatko Nushev*

I. Dynamique • II. Nocturne • III. Festif

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The last of **Brahms's** three piano quartets was also the first, for by the time it was published, in 1875, some of it was two decades old, dating back to the composer's early 20s – a time of anxiety and confusion, personal and professional, as he was obliged to confront at once the mental decline of the composer he most admired - Robert Schumann - and his own growing love for Schumann's wife Clara. He might once have wanted to be Schumann's successor, but not under these circumstances, and not in this way.

Long gestation periods, however, were by no means unusual for Brahms: his First Symphony, in the same key, was in progress during most of the same period, and in the latter part of it he was also struggling with his first two string quartets. Having got those out of the way, in 1873, he seems to have felt able to go back to this troublesome piano quartet, and to the first movement and finale he had drafted in 1855-6, when his plan had been for a work in the more awkward key of C sharp minor. Probably feeling the old finale to be too brief for the work he now had in mind, he made it the *Scherzo*, though it is not in the usual triple time and does not have a trio section. The opening movement, inevitably, stayed in place. Brahms himself gave the first public performance, with members of Joseph Hellmesberger's quartet, in Vienna on 18 November 1876.

The first movement begins as if presenting a slow introduction, but the formidable material here soon speeds up and turns into the first subject, then rapidly gives way to the songful second, on which the music pauses a while to contemplate. Contemplation leads into strenuous and intense development, after which the recapitulation brings a note of dignity restored – though, of course, the movement has to end with a sense that there is more to be said.

Galloping away, the second movement has an urgency no less potent here than it would have been at the end. The piece is a compact sonata allegro – brief, but packing a punch in its development.

The slow movement in E major, which follows, has often been taken to be early, too, by virtue of its straightforward opening texture, where the cello sings out against a simple piano accompaniment. The cello's melody is, however, richly developed in what follows, with first the violin and then also the viola joining in. One might recall the slow movement of the First Symphony, similarly in E major.

Picking up a cue from the *Andante*, the *Finale* starts out by focusing on the violin, the others being soon drawn in so that this movement can equal the power of the first and the animation of the second. Only a *Finale* on this scale, and with this drive, could wrap up so imposing a work.

Pande Shahov wrote his Quintet for piano, clarinet, violin, cello and percussion for this evening's artists, who performed it for the first time at the festival in Maribor, Slovenia, last September. It is an arrangement of his Trio of 2009 for clarinet, viola and piano. In the interim Shahov had created a concert-length sequence of Macedonian folksong arrangements for the present ensemble, and perhaps something of that experience seeped into this Quintet, bringing out, for one thing, the tones of jazz and blues.

'The main idea behind each movement', the composer notes, 'is in the interaction between the parts, while avoiding homophonic and polyphonic options. Indeed, heterophony may prove to be a much more interesting texture, if we go beyond the somewhat clumsy definition of it as ornamented unison. Searching for metaphors outside the musical environment helped the initial stages of the composition; thus, each movement explores a single metaphor.'

'The opening movement, *Igra* ('Play'), explores interaction as playful cooperation, perhaps a repetitive but non-periodical gesture of children playing. The middle movement, *Monistra* ('String of beads'), focuses on interaction by addition, with an imagined situation where each player adds a particular contribution to a continuum, as in a collaborative activity of making a very long string of beads. The final movement, *Potok* ('Water spring'), imagines a fast-flowing spring, where stones on the streambed create the illusion of some currents overtaking others.

'The aim of the piece is to engage the performers in textures where it may not be easy to establish who is a soloist and who accompanies. The long-term interest in jazz and folk music can be detected at times; however, the aim is also to create opportunities for virtuosic performance within the chamber music environment.'

The programme ends with an arrangement by the percussionist on stage, **Vlatko Nushev**, of an early work by **Guillaume Connesson**, his Sextet for oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, double bass and piano. Connesson wrote this for a concert being given by friends at New Year in 1998. The first movement is, to quote his own note, 'a series of variations on rhythmic processes inherited from American repetitive music' – especially that of John Adams, a key figure for Connesson. Then comes 'a sweet-sad confidence sung by the clarinet over harmonic carpets provided by strings and piano'. Here one may sense much more the composer's French connection, especially to Parisian suavity of the mid-20th Century. The compact finale 'sets free a feverish joy among motifs that include a wink across to Schubert's 'Trout'. The score ends with a cadential thumbing of the nose.'

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