

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 9 June 2022 7.30pm

## Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Armand Djikoloum oboe

Elena Urioste violin

Nathan Amaral violin

Rosalind Ventris viola

Laura van der Heijden cello

Tom Poster piano

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**Edward MacDowell** (1860-1908)

To a Wild Rose from *10 Woodland Sketches* Op. 51 (1896)

**Edward Elgar** (1857-1934)

Soliloquy (c.1930-1)

**Frank Bridge** (1879-1941)

Phantasie Piano Trio in C minor (1907)

**Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976)

Phantasy Quartet in F minor for oboe and string trio Op. 2 (1932)

### Interval

**Amy Beach** (1867-1944)

Piano Quintet Op. 67 (1907)

*I. Adagio - Allegro moderato • II. Adagio espressivo •  
III. Allegro agitato - Adagio come prima - Presto*

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Tonight's transatlantic programme features three British works framed by two American ones, and at the same time showcases the flexible layout of Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective, which begins with a solo pianist and is expanded by one player in number with each piece. The programme also highlights the idea of fantasy, whether in terms of the multi-sectional British chamber-music pieces composed in the first three decades or so of the 20th Century, or in the looser sense of naturally unfolding expression unbound by the strictures of traditional musical forms.

The gently reflective 'To a Wild Rose' is far and away the piece for which American composer **Edward MacDowell** is best remembered. It's one of several *Woodland Sketches* he composed at the New Hampshire farm his wife Marian bought in 1896 – which later became, and still remains, an important artists' colony. Marked 'With simple tenderness', nothing could be more uncluttered than its satisfyingly balanced four-bar phrases, though gentle twists in the harmony lend it an air of wistfulness.

A fascinating footnote in **Elgar's** output, the *Soliloquy* is by comparison more free-ranging and improvisatory. With something of an Eastern flavour and a beguiling storytelling quality so well suited to the oboe, it has the quality of an operatic recitative, with an introduction (here a returning refrain) and an uncluttered accompaniment of delicious rolled chords. This was the only movement Elgar completed of a projected suite for oboe and strings he intended for the celebrated oboist Léon Goossens ('Such artistry!' Elgar said of him). After Elgar's death, the orchestrated version was completed at Goossens's request by Gordon Jacob.

A small array of *Phantasies* came into being around the turn of the 20th Century thanks to Walter Willson Cobbett, a wealthy businessman, keen amateur violinist and patron of music, who wanted to promote a single, multi-section piece of chamber music, shorter and less bound by structural convention than the Austro-German works of Haydn, Beethoven and Mozart. Cobbett funded a competition that ran for six iterations between 1905 and 1919. Having won a special prize at the inaugural competition in 1905 with his *Phantasie* for string quartet, **Frank Bridge** won the 1907 competition outright (and a £50 sum) this time with his *Phantasie* for piano trio. Structurally the piece is tricky to pin down – of which Cobbett would no doubt have approved – but it combines elements of traditional sonata form and an arch (or palindromic) form. The terse introduction – and the first main theme, which starts low in the violin with an asymmetrically rippling piano accompaniment – return at the end. Then comes an andante section, beginning with a long, expressive cello melody, and a playful scherzo launched by the piano, before the andante returns, to be rounded off by the terse introduction and theme from the beginning.

20 years after writing his *Phantasie*, Bridge would begin to mentor the young **Benjamin Britten**, who later recalled mammoth

composition lessons, and a strict master whose 'loathing of all sloppiness and amateurishness set me standards to aim for that I've never forgotten'. Britten later entered the Royal College of Music, where he wrote his *Phantasy* for oboe quartet (following a *Phantasy* for string quintet, which won a College prize, also set up by Cobbett). Like Elgar's *Soliloquy*, it was written for and dedicated to Léon Goossens, and after its first performance, on a BBC broadcast in 1933, it became the first piece of Britten's to be played abroad, at the 1934 ISCM Festival in Florence. (Britten, aged only 20, had to curtail his trip two days after the performance to return home after his father died.) Perhaps taking a leaf out of his former teacher Bridge's book, the piece combines elements of sonata and arch form, opening with a march section and 'peaking' in a central slow, pastoral section. The oboe takes something of a starring role, perhaps looking forward to two significant works Britten would contribute to the oboe repertoire: the *Temporal Variations* and the *6 Metamorphoses After Ovid*.

**Amy Beach** was the first female American to gain recognition as a composer. By the age of four she could play back by ear hymns in four-part harmony, and at 17 she made her debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, playing Chopin's F minor Piano Concerto. Largely self-taught, she began her composing career as a writer of songs (producing over 130 in all), but her 'Gaelic' Symphony and Piano Concerto were popular and she produced many choral and piano pieces. She composed her Piano Quintet in 1907, the year Bridge wrote his *Phantasie* trio.

After a darkly mysterious introduction with strings suspended in octaves, the turbulent first theme of the first movement proper (*Allegro moderato*) is based on the second theme from the finale of Brahms's Piano Quintet. Beach's second theme is more elegant, beginning with the strings in parallel and with a gentle broken-octave accompaniment in the piano. The dreamlike second movement, played with the stringed instruments muted throughout, opens with a heart-achingly beautiful melody for the first violin, but just as affecting are the slowly unfurling tendrils of the other instrumental lines. The central section is more impassioned and, when the opening tune returns, in a lovely touch, Beach hands it to the cello. The last movement bursts in with a scherzo-like introduction which gives way to an expansive viola tune. Soon there are gentle rumbles returning us to the sound-world of the first movement's introduction, out of which the cello kicks off a fugue subject that draws in the other string instruments. This generates a climax that leads to a return of the suspended string theme from the first movement. Following a lush, reposeful section, Beach concludes with a *Presto* coda that propels the quintet to a dramatic close.

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