

Maxwell Quartet with Stewart Goodyear, Piano Program Notes

PURCELL:

In the summer of 1680, Henry Purcell started to experiment with an older musical form, the fantasia. The basic structure of a fantasia is the construction of several musical phrases, or points, each of which is given a contrapuntal working out before going on to the next one. Purcell would have been familiar with these from Matthew Locke's (c. 1621-1677) fantasia sets of a generation earlier. Purcell brought his own ideas to the form, making each point full of theatrical gestures, and adding in chromaticism and dissonance.

HAYDN:

Early in 1799, some thirty string quartets later and fresh from the success of *The Creation*, Haydn agreed to write a set of six quartets for the music-loving aristocrat Prince Lobkowitz, who had recently commissioned Beethoven's Op 18 quartets. By July 1799 Haydn had finished two of the quartets, and for the next three years or so still had hopes of completing the project. But his physical strength was gradually sapped by the composition of *The seasons*. The two quartets, published in 1802 as Op 77 and with a dedication to Lobkowitz, were to remain Haydn's last completed works in the medium. They make a glorious culmination. With all the nonchalant mastery of technique acquired over five decades of quartet-writing, the Op 77 quartets encompass a vast range of experience, from rustic earthiness, through sociable wit and anarchic comedy, to Wordsworthian voyages across 'strange seas of thought, alone.

Compared with the breezy (at least on the surface) first movement of Op 77 No 1, the allegro moderato of Op 77 No 2 is an altogether grander, more densely worked affair. Whereas the G major quartet had tended to favour the first violin, the ideas are here democratically shared between the instruments. The main theme is an ample, lyrical melody which Haydn immediately repeats and varies in an enriched texture. Its opening phrase pervades the second group of themes, initially as a shadowy counterpoint (in the second violin) to a sinuous chromatic melody. But it is an apparently incidental figure, based on repeated quavers, that dominates the central development. Progressively fragmented, this motif leads the music via a series of mysterious, gliding modulations deep into esoteric tonal regions. Haydn's quartets had long been famous for their harmonic experiments. This still-astonishing passage caps them all.

The so-named menuetto, placed second, is as much a one-in-the-bar scherzo as its counterpart in the G major quartet. The mood here is even more zany, with its half-comic, half-truculent conflict between triple and duple metre (evocative of a Czech furiant), its lightning contrasts of texture, and the ongoing identity crisis for the cello, which persists in imitating a drum. As in the G major quartet, the trio dips to the key of the flat submediant (here D flat major), though now the tone is one of lyrical tenderness, enhanced by deep, veiled textures and a pianissimo dynamic.

The move to the "flat" side of the spectrum for the trio is balanced by Haydn's choice of the bright, "sharp" key of D major for the andante. This is a favourite of many quartet players, with good reason. It opens with an ingenuous duet for violin and cello, irreverently described by composer Robin Holloway as "'three blind mice' with twiddles." Yet, as so often in Haydn, the initial air of simplicity is deceptive. From the moment second violin and viola add their voices

for a gravely sonorous harmonization of the melody (with all four instruments in their lowest registers), the music suggests a more complex experience. It unfolds as an individual synthesis of rondo and variations, with a 'developing' episode in D minor led by second violin, and a reprise of the theme on the cello's high A string against filigree figuration for the first violin. Ebbing away mysteriously, with murmuring inner parts, the movement is a quiet, and sublime, apotheosis of Haydn's many 'walking' andantes.

The finale, yet again based on a single theme, resumes and intensifies the scherzo's tugs between duple and triple time. Few could guess the metre from the opening bars. Haydn here juxtaposes and transfigures polonaise and Slavonic folk-dance (complete with bagpipe drones) in music of unquenchable rhythmic and contrapuntal energy. Haydn's rhythmic games reach their apogee at the start of the development, where the instruments tumble over each other in a riot of controlled mayhem. This gloriously uninhibited movement rounds off what was destined to be Haydn's last completed quartet.

—*from notes by Richard Wigmore*

ALBERGA:

Eleanor Alberga is a highly-regarded British composer with commissions from the BBC Proms and The Royal Opera, Covent Garden. With a substantial output ranging from solo instrumental works to full-scale symphonic works and operas, her music is performed all over the world.

In a recent interview, Alberga said: "I'm always stumped when I'm asked what my music sounds like, or what my style is, but two things are there in my life and in my music: one is my Caribbean influence and this has to do with tonality and with rhythms, and the other is extreme contemporary European music, and my music always grows out of these two . . . Do I want people to hear my so-called 'identities' in my music? No. My wish is that they hear good music that communicates something human to them."

Born 1949 in Kingston, Jamaica, Alberga decided at the age of five to be a concert pianist. Five years later, she was composing works for the piano. In 1968 she won the biennial Royal Schools of Music Scholarship for the West Indies, which she took up in 1970 at the Royal Academy of Music in London studying piano and singing. A budding career as a solo pianist—she was one of 3 finalists in the International Piano Concerto Competition in Dudley, UK in 1974—was soon augmented by composition with her arrival at the London Contemporary Dance Theatre in 1978. One of the very few pianists with the deepest understanding of modern dance, her class improvisations for the company became the stuff of legend. These in turn led to works commissioned and conceived for dance by the company, and Alberga later became the company's Musical Director—conducting, composing and playing on LCDT's many tours.

It was on leaving LCDT that Alberga fully embarked on her calling as a composer. Since then, interest in her music across all genres—orchestral, chamber, vocal, as well as works for stage and screen—has accelerated, while her output has continued to grow. In 2015 her commissioned work *Arise, Athena!* for the opening of the Last Night of the BBC Proms was seen and heard by millions, and cemented a reputation as a composer of huge originality and consummate skill.

At different times, Alberga was a member of the African dance company Fontomfrom, and played guitar and sang with the Jamaican Folk Singers. She was part of the duo Double Exposure with her husband Thomas Bowes, and together they have founded and nurtured the Arcadia Festival in the English countryside where they live.

Her music is not easy to pigeon-hole. The musical language of her opera *Letters of a Love Betrayed* (2009), premiered at the Royal Opera House, has drawn comparisons with Berg and Debussy, while her lighter works draw more obviously on her Jamaican heritage and time as a singer with the Jamaican Folk Singers and as a member of an African dance company. But the emotional range of her language, her structural clarity and a fabulously assured technique have always drawn high praise.

The orchestral works, *Sun Warrior* (1990) written for the inaugural Women in Music Festival, and her adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1994) for symphony orchestra and narrators, premiered at the Royal Festival Hall in 1994 with the London Philharmonic, helped build her growing reputation. 2001 also saw the completion and premiere of a highly praised first *Violin Concerto*, written for her husband, Thomas Bowes and commissioned by The Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Chamber music abounds, both in the more traditional form of three string quartets, the piano quintet *Clouds*, and more unusual line-ups (a series of Nocturnes, featuring horn and oboe with string quartet, is an unfolding project.) Works for voice have more recently come to the fore with a luminous setting of George Herbert's *The Glimpse* and most recently the song cycle *The Soul's Expression* to poetry by George Eliot, Emily Bronte and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, both premiered by the baritone Jeremy Huw Williams.

In 2020 Alberga was elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, and in 2021 she was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to British Music.

Clouds was originally commissioned by the London Contemporary Dance Theatre and was conceived for dance. Tonight's performance is only the second in North America since the quintet was performed in San Francisco, with the composer at the piano, in 1996.

The Maxwell Quartet

1st Prize winner and Audience Prize winner at the 2017 Trondheim (Norway) International Chamber Music Competition, the Glasgow-based Maxwell Quartet has been hailed for "great communication" (The Strad) and as "brilliantly fresh, unexpected and exhilarating" (The Scottish Herald). The Quartet is now firmly regarded as one of Britain's finest string quartets, with a strong commitment to their folk music heritage and to bringing together wide-ranging projects and programmes to expand the quartet repertoire.

The Quartet performs regularly across the UK and abroad, including London's Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, St Martin-in-the-Fields, and the BBC Proms. Their 2017-18 season included engagements in Denmark, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, France and China. They have held residencies at Oxford University, Perth Concert Hall and many festivals across the UK, including their own Loch Shiel Festival in the Scottish highlands. Their first U.S. tour, nearly a

month long, in winter 2019, will include a NYC début on the prestigious Schneider Concert series. Their début CD release, of Haydn and traditional Scottish folk music, will coincide.

The Quartet consists of four great friends who grew up playing classical and folk music together in youth orchestras and music schools across Scotland. Launched in 2010, the Quartet was named the Conservatoire of Scotland's Young Artists in Residence the very next year.

Passionate about partnerships, the Quartet has collaborated with the Danish String Quartet, world-renowned pianists Benjamin Grosvenor and Jeremy Menuhin, the Cryptic Theatre, the Royal Ballet School, the soul duo Lunir, cinematographer Herman Kolgen, and many more. They have also commissioned some of the UK's most dynamic composers including Anna Meredith, Tom Harrold, Mark Simpson and Colin Broom. The quartet regularly broadcasts on BBC Radio Scotland, as well as giving school workshops and children's concerts.

The Maxwell Quartet was mentored by the Endellion Quartet and Hatto Beyerle, founding member of the Alban Berg Quartet.

The Maxwell Quartet appears by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists, chambermuse.com.

Stewart Goodyear

Proclaimed "a phenomenon" by the Los Angeles Times and "one of the best pianists of his generation" by the Philadelphia Inquirer, Stewart Goodyear is an accomplished concert pianist, improviser and composer. Mr. Goodyear has performed with, and has been commissioned by, many of the major orchestras and chamber music organizations around the world.

Mr. Goodyear's discography includes the complete sonatas and piano concertos of Beethoven, as well as concertos by Tchaikovsky, Grieg and Rachmaninov, an album of Ravel piano works, and an album, entitled "For Glenn Gould", which combines repertoire from Mr. Gould's US and Montreal debuts. His Rachmaninov recording received a Juno nomination for Best Classical Album for Soloist and Large Ensemble Accompaniment. Mr. Goodyear's recording of his own transcription of Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker (Complete Ballet)", was chosen by the New York Times as one of the best classical music recordings of 2015. His discography is released on the Marquis Classics, Orchid Classics, Steinway and Sons, and the Bright Shiny Things labels.

Highlights of Mr. Goodyear's 2022-23 season include return engagements with the Baltimore Symphony, Colorado Symphony and the Nashville Symphony, his debut with Orchestra of St. Luke's, and his North American tour with the Chineke! Orchestra of the UK.