

Thursday 24th June 2021, 11am & 6pm

Opening Concert

Penarth Pier Pavilion

Piano Trio in C major, Hob XV:27

Josef Haydn (1732-1809)

Composed 1795 or 1796

Published 1797

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Presto*

Elena Urioste *violin*, Alice Neary *cello*, Tom Poster *piano*

Therese Jansen (1770-1843), the dedicatee of this wonderful trio by Haydn, was born in Germany but lived most of her life in London, where she became known as one of the outstanding pianists of her day. She never, so far as is known, performed outside the home. The works dedicated to her, by her teacher, Muzio Clementi, and Jan Ladislav Dussek, not to mention Haydn, who presented her not only this work but two other piano trios, as well as two of his grandest and most difficult piano sonatas, no. 50 in C major, and no. 52 in E-flat major, are testaments to her high level of pianism. She met Haydn in 1791 when he was on the first of his tours to London; in 1795 he served as a witness to her wedding. Haydn also wrote his Piano Trio in E-flat major, No. 31 for Jansen (though did not dedicate it to her) – its finale, a joke meant to expose a pompous violinist, shows a humorous outlook shared between composer and pianist.

Too often we can be guilty of listening to works by the great composers and forget the players for whom the works were imagined. We talk about the styles and periods of composers in the same way we talk about the styles and periods of painters. But Haydn's style changed substantially depending on the musicians for whom he wrote and the audiences who came to listen. There's continuity, sure, between Haydn in Austria and Haydn in England, but even first-time listeners can hear there's quite a difference too. What's pertinent here is that his piano works for Therese Jansen are of a different order entirely from those written simultaneously for another friend, Rebecca Schroeter – virtuosic and daring rather than warm and dear. Public versus private – though Jansen never got to play in public.

Virtuosic writing for the pianist does not entail virtuosic writing for the violin and the cello – that must wait for another century. However, in this trio the violin does grow in importance, and certainly has a stronger individual profile than in other trios by Haydn. And it must be said that the virtuosity displayed by the pianist is worn lightly from the first note of the first movement. The mood is in some ways so relaxed that we can take the pianist's dexterity for granted and be lulled by the sense of effortless fancy before Haydn's penchant for surprises begins to be felt. Surprises continue in the expressive slow movement, which, after a serene opening, shifts with a jolt into territory almost inconceivable. The *Presto* is pure Haydn, high spirits and jokes throughout, and an ending that comes before you expect it – too soon, and yet just right.

Piano Quartet No.2 in G minor, Op. 45

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Composed 1885-1886

Published 1887

- I. *Allegro molto moderato*
- II. *Allegro molto*
- III. *Adagio non troppo*
- IV. *Allegro molto*

Lesley Hatfield *violin*, David Adams *viola*, Alice Neary *cello*, Robin Green *piano*

This quartet represents one of the only large-scale works undertaken by Fauré during the 1880s, a decade in which he supported his young family primarily through publishing songs and giving music lessons, and long before he became, in 1905, director of the Paris Conservatoire, which he reformed with zeal (to his enemies he was “Robespierre”, perhaps for his disregard of reactionaries and the ruthlessness with which he enacted change, and also perhaps in the hope that his reign would come to a swift end). The work does not seem to have been written for commission. It is generally considered to be at or near the summit of Fauré’s chamber works – and this from a composer considered to be at or near the summit of all those who have composed for the chamber.

The strings open the work with a statement in octaves of the first theme, a bold gesture that feels as if the sombre stranger sitting next to you had suddenly gripped your shoulder and confessed. However, by the end of the movement the furious intensity of this opening has played itself out and closes instead in a hushed G major. With relief we can return to our own thoughts. But though this luminous ending foreshadows the ultimate destination of the entire work, it can’t yet really be the end – a glorious G major hasn’t yet been earned. As if to mark this, the second movement Scherzo is in a frenzied C minor, and the confrontational first theme of the first movement itself makes a return. The slow movement is the heart of the work, tender, reflective, the piano summoning childhood memories of church bells, before the strings take their evocative turn at the bells, *pizzicato*. The last movement reinvoles not only the mood of the first, but also traces a line over its themes (and those of the Scherzo); however, the relentless pace is ultimately too great for any doubts to hang on, and in the coda’s last burst of speed the soul seems finally free to take leave of its weighty past, the triumph total.

Programme notes © James Lea

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