

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021, 1.15pm & 8pm

**Brahms Plus**  
*Penarth Pier Pavilion*

**Lieux retrouvés for cello and piano, Op.26**

*Thomas Adès (b.1971)*

2009

- I. *Les eaux*
- II. *La montagne*
- III. *Les champs*
- IV. *La ville: Cancan macabre*

**Alice Neary cello, Robin Green piano**

This monumentally difficult work was commissioned by the Aldeburgh Festival, Wigmore Hall, and Carnegie Hall, and was written for and given its premiere by Steven Isserlis at Aldeburgh in 2009, with the composer at the piano. The first movement begins with gentle piano figuration under a plaintive cello line. Intensification ensues, the still water becoming a torrent. In terms of style, it would be difficult to imagine a greater range of references but suffice it to say that in a short space of time virtually all of music history is here – the ability to adumbrate and absorb is breath-taking.

The second movement is a depiction not just of a mountain, but also its climbers, a modern take on the Romantic sublime. If the humble tramping footsteps of the mountaineers initially calls to mind Wordsworth's astonishment, in *The Prelude*, that he had "crossed the Alps" at the Simplon Pass without quite realising it, too absorbed in the humdrum step-by-step of the journey to have measured its significance, by the close of the movement Adès's mountaineers are planting a flag at the summit. The stratospheric writing for the cello is itself something of a summit. "Les champs" is a pastoral scene of fields in the gloaming. The breath of sleeping animals can be heard at the very top of the cello's range. The final movement leaves mountains and fields behind for the gaudy pleasures of the city, although this is a city where one might still dance the *Cancan*.

Isserlis has said that in this work, "Adès is demanding things of the cello no one has ever demanded before."

**Horn Trio in Eb major, Op.40**

*Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)*

Composed 1865

Published 1866

- I. *Andante – Poco più animato*
- II. *Scherzo: Allegro*
- III. *Adagio mesto*
- IV. *Finale: Allegro con brio*

**Elena Urioste violin, Ben Goldscheider horn, Tom Poster piano**

Perhaps in a gesture to the Baroque foundations of the sonata idea, Brahms imposes a slow-fast-slow-fast structure on this work, thereby evoking Bach more than Mozart, though Classical sonata form does emerge in the second movement Scherzo. As often with Brahms, there is a tension between allegiance to the past – here represented not only through certain structural procedures but also in choosing the older natural horn over the then coming-into-

fashion valved instrument – and a thoroughly up-to-date and unabashedly Romantic language. Though a professional pianist, Brahms had played the horn as a boy, and his multi-instrument father was primarily a horn player, and so one might hear “the past” in personal terms as well as historical. Incidentally, Brahms indicated that a cello might replace the horn if a horn absolutely couldn’t be found; however, some twenty years later he did feel relaxed enough about substitution to publish a viola part, which pleased him. One can understand Brahms’s initial reluctance to countenance any changes to his score – the sound of the horn and the distinctive flourishes that characterise horn-writing conjure up worlds not easily captured by strings.

The opening movement features a contrast between a broad lyrical A section in E-flat major and a shadowy quicker B section in C minor. These alternate in typical Rondo fashion. The Scherzo sees Brahms in full hunting gear, a scene which allows him all kinds of rhythmic fun, yet the slow song-like Trio keeps the theme of tender contrast alive. By the time we reach the sorrowful slow movement in E-flat minor, we might suspect that melancholy rather than exuberance underpins the work, and indeed Brahms’s beloved mother had passed away earlier in the year. Near the end of this extended lament its second theme is transformed into a version of what will become the main theme of the altogether sunnier finale - Brahms finds a musical device for working through his grief. The hunt is back on in the rollicking last movement but given the thematic link to the lament we can sense that sadness will forever shade this heart even at its happiest.

*Programme notes © James Lea*

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