

Friday 25th June 2021, 1.15pm & 6pm

## World Première Concert

Penarth Pier Pavilion

This concert is dedicated to the memory of Linda Osborn

*Pier Music - world première*

*Robert Fokkens (b.1975)*

- I. *Gently Expressive*
- II. *Scherzo 1*
- III. *Aria*
- IV. *Scherzo 2*
- V. *Finale*

David Adams *violin*, Alice Neary *cello*

My favourite musical projects have always involved working with friends and, ideally, developing a piece over a fairly long period of time. Working with Alice and David over a number of years to bring this piece to life for their festival - which takes place ten minutes from my front door - has consequently been a real joy for me, bringing together their exceptional music-making with our shared interests in community and communication through music, embodied so powerfully in the festival.

My starting point for the piece was to make a movement which presented a collection of musical ideas and allowed them to start to interact. I deliberately didn't push them too hard or find a full resolution for them, as my plan was to have a set of materials with which to build the rest of the piece. From this first movement, I made a multi-movement plan in which each of the following movements would explore just one or two ideas from the first - the two scherzi (II and IV), for example, starting from the same material but pairing it with different ideas in each.

I have written a good deal of string music over the years, perhaps because of my own background as a violinist, but seldom reference classical repertoire intentionally or explicitly. In this piece, I became fixated on the idea of drawing on pieces which had been important to me in the past for my musical ideas. Perhaps, in some instances, working with such wonderful musicians gave me a chance to atone by proxy for the crimes I had committed against certain pieces as a player - though some may see this as a rather curious form of atonement. Be that as it may, if occasionally the scent of a Haydn or Prokofiev concerto might waft through a texture otherwise woven from strands of various South African traditions, other folk musics, electronica and a range of 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century composers, you are, most likely, not imagining it.

*Pier Music* is dedicated to Alice and David, and was commissioned with funds from the PRS Foundation's Open Fund for Organisations.

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## Piano Quintet in A major, D667 “The Trout”

*Franz Schubert (1797-1828)*

*Composed 1819*

*Published 1829*

- I. *Allegro vivace*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Scherzo: Presto*
- IV. *Thema: Andantino – Variations I-V – Allegretto*
- V. *Finale: Allegro giusto*

*Elena Urioste violin, Scott Dickinson viola, Kate Gould cello, David Stark double bass, Tom Poster piano*

Schubert’s beloved “Trout” Quintet finds its origins in a song by the composer, as does the finale of this year’s festival, Mendelssohn’s Quartet in A minor, Op. 13, derive from one of Mendelssohn’s songs. However, the conception of the two works, and the methods by which each of the composers integrated the materials of their songs into a large-scale chamber idiom, are radically different. Whereas Mendelssohn returned to his song to expand the range of feeling within it – to a friend he wrote of the Quartet that “I think I express the song well” – as if he had not fully grasped the implication of the song when he had written it – Schubert’s retaking up of “The Trout” was not intrinsically motivated but due instead to a request from a friend. Sylvester Paumgartner was a businessman in the Austrian town of Steyr, which Schubert visited in 1819, the probable date of composition. Paumgartner asked Schubert not only to write a chamber work based on “The Trout”, but one specifically for the same forces as the recently published quintet by Hummel – hence the double bass. Idiosyncratic pieces usually have an idiosyncratic history.

Perhaps the nature of this request, from an occasional friend, explains the speed with which Schubert composed the work, as well as the fact that he uses a fair amount of repetition, especially in the first, second and last movements, in which lengthy sections are merely transpositions of earlier material. Schubert fulfilled the request quickly and moved on. This is perhaps not what Schumann meant when praising Schubert’s capacity to write music of heavenly length. Nevertheless, the melodies are so pleasant, the interplay between the instruments so delightful, the feeling of old Vienna so prevalent - a Vienna which then might host a thousand separate balls on a single night - that no one minds the abundance of repetition. One might even argue that it is the work’s strength. It is also a reminder that each work by a great composer is not aimed at posterity, not concerned with transcendence, airily indifferent to the claims of immortality. It may just be music of the very highest order without the composer quite knowing it, not quite realising that the discarded take on the cutting-room floor is the keeper.

The five movements are as well-known as any in the Western tradition. The first is a wide-open sonata form with a recapitulation in the subdominant. The second movement is built on three themes, rising chromatically, the first in F major, the downhearted second in F-sharp minor, and the third finishing in G major. The scherzo is pure fun, though moments of space hint at other worlds. The fourth-movement variations are of course where “The Trout” itself is fully present, a series of imaginative variety that casts the song in unexpected light and shadow. The finale, though indeed repetitive, is so gloriously exuberant that one could happily listen to it on repeat forever, repetition originally born of a haste to get the thing written, but ultimately feeling to this listener like a discovery - a way to keep the best moments of one’s life eternally aloft in the air.

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Artists’ biographies can be found on our website: [www.penarthchambermusicfestival.org.uk](http://www.penarthchambermusicfestival.org.uk)