Nicholas Yonge Society

18 October 2024

Ensemble Perpetuo

Fenella Humphreys	Violin
Gary Pomeroy	Viola
Cara Berridge	Cello
Emma Abbate	Piano

Adrian Sutton (b.1967) Trio Dances for String Trio (2021)
Galliard
Sarabande
Rigaudon

Adrian Sutton is a British composer, producer, and an accomplished violinist and violist. He was the composer and a principal instrumental performer for the smash-hit, award-winning play *War Horse.* His scores cross orchestral, chamber and electronic genres, and have featured in a number of other successful National Theatre productions including *Coram Boy*, *Angels in America*, and the multiple Olivier- and Tony award-winning *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

Adrian's chamber music scores have frequently involved collaboration with the violinist Fenella Humphreys, including the Arpeggiare Variations for her 'Bach2TheFuture' project, Sap and Sinews for her 'Four Seasons Recomposed' series, and a recording of his Spring Masque for violin/viola duo. Fenella is the dedicatee of his recent violin concerto, which she premiered last year at a special celebratory South Bank concert.

The Trio Dances for String Trio was commissioned by the Presteigne Festival and premiered there by Fenella with Perpetuo in 2021. Adrian Sutton writes:

"This is a little suite of three dances for string trio that, in a sense, picks up from where my violin/viola duo Spring Masque (2012) left off. Ever since writing the score for the National Theatre's production of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, I had fallen in love with a certain kind of Renaissance-inspired sound which infuses the first of these dances. The opening characteristic stress pattern of the 6/8 *Galliard* metre is used as a platform throughout the movement to explore the thematic material in a series of increasingly frequent modulations. The *Sarabande* is based on a simple tune that I wrote many years ago and, until now, never found a home for. I like how composition frequently works like that – things get tucked away in a drawer, waiting for their right moment. Each of the three instruments gets a turn with the melodic material. The final *Rigaudon* is an earthy, robust dance in 2/4 time to round the suite off; though it contains some contrapuntal passagework to give the players a workout!"

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) Piano Quartet in E ♭ Op 47 (1842)
Sostenuto assai — Allegro ma non troppo
Scherzo. Molto vivace
Andante cantabile
Finale. Vivace

Coming after his 'Liederjahre' of 1840 and the subsequent 'Symphonic Year' of 1841, 1842 was Schumann's 'Chamber Music Year': three string quartets, the particularly successful piano quintet and today's piano quartet. Such creativity may have been initiated by Schumann at last winning, in July 1840, the protracted legal case in which his ex-teacher

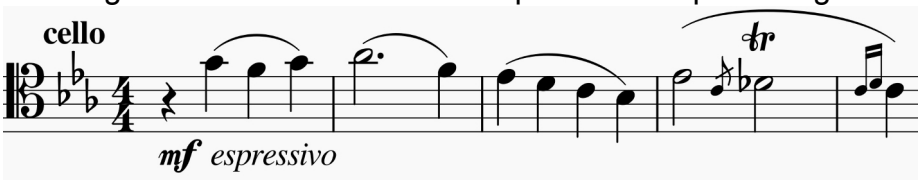
Friedrich Wieck, attempted to forbid him from marrying Wieck's daughter, the piano virtuoso Clara. They were married on 12 September 1840, the day before Clara's 21st birthday.

1842, however, did not start well for the Schumanns. Robert accompanied Clara at the start of her concert tour of North Germany, but he tired of being in her shadow, returned home to Leipzig in a state of deep melancholy, and comforted himself with beer, champagne and, unable to compose, contrapuntal exercises. Clara's father spread an unfounded and malicious rumour that the Schumanns had separated.

However, in April Clara returned and Robert started a two-month study of the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. During June he wrote the first two of his own three quartets, the third following in July. He dedicated them to his Leipzig friend and colleague Felix Mendelssohn. The three quartets were first performed on September 13, for Clara's birthday. She thought them 'new and, at the same time, lucid, finely worked and always in quartet idiom' - a comment reflecting Schumann the critic's own view that the ‘proper’ quartet style should avoid ‘symphonic furore’ and aim rather for a conversational tone in which ‘everyone has something to say’.

After an August visit to Bohemia (where the Schumanns called on Metternich), the Piano Quintet followed in mid-October and today's Piano Quartet in November. Both pieces, according to *Grove*, show a tension between symphonic and traditionally chamber writing as 'chamber music came to occupy an intermediary position between private entertainment and public display'. Although the Quintet is played more often than the Quartet, the latter is in many ways the better piece.

Schumann, admirer of Beethoven that he was, works his way towards the main theme of the first movement. The brief opening *sostenuto* introduces and explores its first four notes. Then, in the *Allegro,* the strings shorten these notes and speed them up drawing an approving comment in running quavers from the piano. Finally, the cello discovers what they have all been looking for and gives us the exuberant theme (*illustrated*). The exuberance, helped by the running quavers, continues throughout the movement albeit interrupted twice by the return of the *sostenuto* passage.

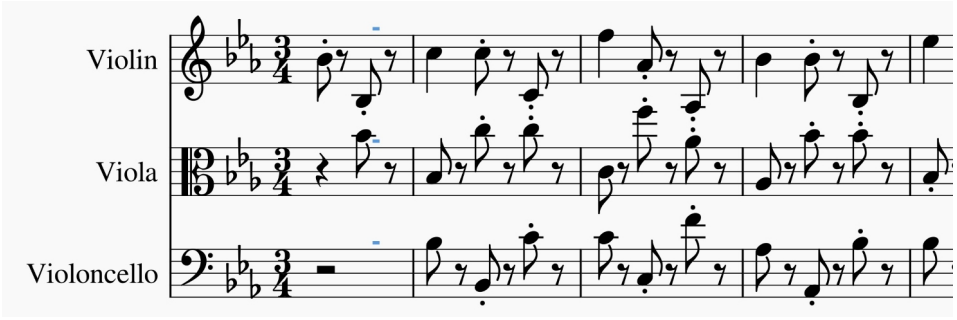


The *Scherzo* alternates with two contrasting *Trios*. The theme of the lightly scampering, Mendelssohn-like *Scherzo* is related to the running quavers of the first movement. The first *Trio* is based on a gently descending scale, while the second *Trio* slows the action even more with bar-long syncopated chords interrupted by scampering.

The cello again gets to introduce the theme in the *Andante*, but in a characteristically Schumann way, as if you had just opened the door into a room where the movement had already started. The cello gets 16 glorious bars to itself before the violin takes over and the cello answers canonically after a 2-bar delay. There is a subdued interlude in the remote key of G ♭ followed by the viola finally getting to play the theme, accompanied by a genially playful passage on the violin. During this the cello is silent to allow its C-string to be tuned down a tone to B ♭ so that the cello can end the movement with a long, low, *pianissimo* B ♭ octave. Above this drone, like the *Sostenuto* opening of the first

movement, the end of the *Andante* anticipates in slow motion the three chords that start the last movement.

After an opening flourish of these three chords rounded off by descending semiquavers, the viola expands these semiquavers into a fugal theme. These busy scales are contrasted with, on the one hand, a creeping, semitone-spaced rising and falling chromatic scale and on the other with a wonderfully skippy canonic variant of the movement's opening chords which leaps within and between the instruments (*illustrated*) . The whole movement is packed with ideas and energy and it gallops to a heroic end with a final version of those three opening chords.



Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924) Piano Quartet No 1 in C minor, Op.15 (1876–79, rev 1883)
Allegro molto moderato
Scherzo: Allegro vivo
Adagio
Allegro molto

Stephen Johnson has recorded an enlightening Radio 3 Discovering Music programme on this work to which I am indebted: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01s35qv

Although Fauré is best known by most people for his vocal writing, in particular his songs and Requiem, some of his best work is the chamber music that he wrote throughout his life: two sonatas each for violin and cello with piano, a piano trio, a string quartet, two piano quartets and two piano quintets.

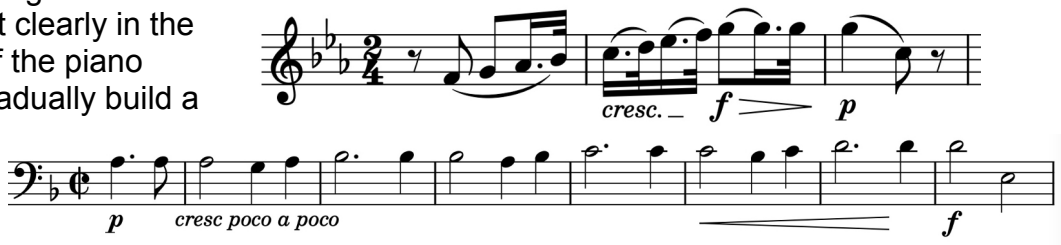
Fauré's career was not straightforward. Born to a family of minor aristocrats in southern France, he was sent aged 9 to board at Niedermeyer's music school in Paris, which trained organists and choirmasters. Fortunately, the excellent grounding it gave to Fauré in renaissance church music was extended to include Schumann, Liszt and Wagner when, on Niedermeyer's death in 1861, Saint-Saëns took over the piano and composition classes. But Fauré remained attached to the modal harmonies of early music throughout his life, much of which was spent as an organist or choirmaster.

His attempts to secure a post at the Paris conservatoire were for a long time thwarted by conservatives who despised his ecclesiastical background and disliked his style of composition. However, he eventually secured a post there aged 52 and, surprisingly, 8 years later, the subversive Fauré became the conservatoire's director. He amply justified his enemies' fears by instituting (necessary) radical reforms, earning himself the sobriquet 'Robespierre' ! While at the conservatoire he taught Maurice Ravel, Georges Enescu and Nadia Boulanger. Deafness, elevation to the Légion d'Honneur and gentle hints eventually prised him from the directorship into retirement in 1920 at the age of 75.

His first piano quartet was started in 1876 during a particularly emotional time for Fauré. In July 1874 he became engaged to Marianne Viardot with whom he had been in love for five years, ever since Saint-Saens had introduced him into Marianne mother's salon. But

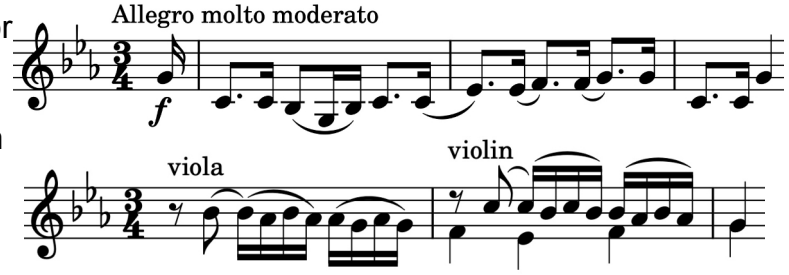
his intense feelings for her were not reciprocated – she evidently felt a mixture of affection and fear towards him – and by October she had broken off the engagement.

The intensity of his feelings at this rejection is shown most clearly in the slow third movement of the piano quartet. The strings gradually build a rising theme which ends in a poignantly falling fifth (*illustrated*). As Stephen Johnson points out this bears more than a passing resemblance to the baritone solo at the beginning of the *Libera Me* of Fauré's Requiem (*Quando caeli movendi sunt et terra*), which he had started to compose at that time (*illustrated*). Fauré's world had indeed been thoroughly shaken by Marianne's rejection.

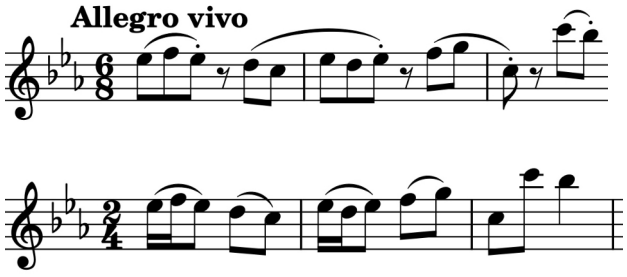


The wider musical world was also undergoing upheavals at that time: 1876 saw the first complete performance of Wagner's Ring. Although Fauré admired Wagner, he was quite capable of gently mocking him and remained true to his own ideals, modestly expressed, of balance and clarity.

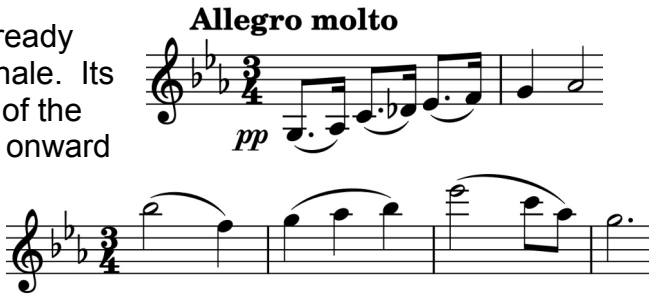
The boldly assertive opening C-minor theme of the work, with unison strings (*illustrated*), soon gives way to a more gentle, lyrical conversation led by the viola, answered by the violin (*illustrated*). The movement enjoys a well-structured, civilised discussion of these ideas, with the opening theme finally moving gently into the major.



The *Scherzo* contrasts two subtly different rhythms: the first given by the piano (*illustrated*) and the second more relaxed one by the strings (*illustrated*). Its Trio section gently mutes the strings against the piano's cascading triplet accompaniment.



The beautiful, substantial *Adagio* which we have already mentioned leads to the exhilarating *Allegro molto* finale. Its opening (*illustrated*) is a much speeded-up version of the slow movement's rising them, integrating it with the onward drive of the first movement's opening. It contrasts gloriously with another slower rising theme (*illustrated*) – one that you can go home singing happily!



Programme notes by Chris Darwin