

Gaspard Piano Trio NYS: Nov 8 2024

This evening's programme is substantially Hungarian. **Sándor Veress** was born in Transylvania and studied and taught in Budapest where he assisted **László Lajtha** in field work (following Bartók and Kodaly) on Hungarian folk music. **Brahms'** Hungarian Dances were inspired by his association with the revolutionary Hungarian exile, violinist Ede Reményi. **Haydn's** early Piano Trio in Bb was written around the time that he started in the service of the Esterházy, Hungarian aristocrats on whose estates **Liszt's** father later worked. Another Hungarian violinist Heinrich Ernst is the dedicatee for **Liszt's** "Carnival in Pest" (Buda's twin).

Sándor Veress (1907-1992) Tre quadri for Piano Trio (1963)

Paysage de Claude Lorrain: Con moto

Et in arcadia ego: Quieto

Der Bauerntanz: Tempo giusto

c.12 mins

Sándor Veress was a leading representative of the generation of Hungarian composers who came after both Bartók, with whom he studied piano, and Kodaly who taught him composition. Veress in turn taught Kurtág, Ligeti and Heinz Holliger. In his twenties, after having been an assistant to László Lajtha, Veress worked with Bartók on classifying Hungarian folk music. His composing also flourished and he became both a distinguished ethnomusicologist and professor of composition in Budapest. However, his post-war career fell foul of the communist regime and in 1949 he emigrated to Switzerland where he was appointed to teach theory and composition at the Berne Conservatory. This post allowed him to travel extensively, taking up guest professorships in the USA and in Australia. Closer to home, he served from 1949 onwards on the jury of the Llangollen International Eisteddfod and was made its vice-president in 1974.

According to *Grove* his musical style inherited melodic craftsmanship from Kodály and restless innovation from Bartók. In the 1950s he pioneered his own twelve-tone serial technique, which became freer in the 1960s when tonight's Piano Trio was written.

Each movement of the trio is inspired by a different painting from the late Renaissance. First one of Claude Lorrain's landscapes – we don't know which, but a gently pastoral scene comes across in the music. The second is Poussin's famous "*Et in Arcadia ego*" which has this inscription on a tomb in idyllic countryside being pointed out by one of a group of figures. The universality of death comes across in the poignancy of the music. A Brueghelesque peasant dance then kicks morbidity into the ditch and brings the work to a rough and rustic conclusion.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) from 21 Hungarian Dances WoO. 1 (1868-80) arr. for Piano Trio by Trio Gaspard

No 16 in F min

No 10 in F

c. 7 mins

Ede Reményi was a Hungarian virtuoso violinist who crossed paths with both Brahms and Liszt. Aged 20 he was involved in the 1848 Hungarian uprising against Austria, and was exiled to the USA. By 1852 he was back in Hamburg where he discovered a young pianist called Johannes Brahms. The two toured together successfully for a couple of years

exploiting Reményi's heady mix of Hungarian and Gypsy violin music. They called in on Liszt, now settled in Weimar, who admired and befriended Reményi, wrote a piece for his wedding and started to write him a violin concerto. The following year 1854 Reményi visited London, where he was appointed solo violinist to Queen Victoria, a post he held for 5 years. He eventually died aged 70 on stage in San Francisco – a dramatic end to a colourful life.

Brahms meanwhile was mulling over the music he had played with Reményi, eventually producing in 1869 a set of 10 Hungarian Dances for piano duet with eleven more appearing in 1880. Quite what of them is Brahms, what Reményi, what Hungarian and what Gypsy exercises minds, but they certainly became popular, helped by catchy tunes and contrasting tempi.

László Lajtha (1892-1963) Piano Trio – Trio Concertante Op.10 (1928)

Premier concert. Allegro energico

Intermezzo. Molto moderato

Second concert. Vivace

c. 20 mins

László Lajtha deserves to be better known. He was the son of a Hungarian leather manufacturer who played the violin well, composed and had ambitions to be a conductor. László studied at the National Hungarian Royal Academy of Music and became strongly associated with the folk music movement of Bartók and Kodály. However his music often has a French flavour, born of extended visits to Paris. These started in 1911 when he studied with Vincent d'Indy and continued between the wars. Some of his music was published in France and he became the only Hungarian member (apart from Liszt) of the Institute des Beaux Arts. His extensive international recognition included winning the Coolidge Prize in 1929 for his Third String Quartet, and spending a year in the UK commissioned to write the music for Höllering's film adaptation of TS Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. Despite such recognition and the domestic distinction of being Director and Professor of Composition and Chamber Music at the Budapest National Conservatory, Director of Music for Hungarian Radio and Director of the Museum of Ethnography, his support for the 1956 Hungarian uprising had him banned from travelling abroad and his music from being played. His extensive output includes 10 string quartets and a variety of other chamber music, 9 symphonies, an opera and 3 ballets.

Tonight's 1928 Op 10 piano trio dates from the time of his prize-winning Third Quartet and has not only great energy but also reflects his guiding principle that '*in all works of art the quality of craftsmanship is a decisive factor of evaluation*'. The *Concertante* title and the *concert* marking for the outer movements refer both to the virtuosic demands made of the players and also to numerous cadenza-like episodes. It was first performed in the UK in 1999 at the Wigmore Hall by the Takács Piano Trio,

INTERVAL

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) Piano Trio in B flat, Hob: XV:38 (1766 or earlier)

Allegro moderato

Menuet

Finale: Presto

c. 13 mins.

Haydn wrote about 45 piano trios throughout his life, starting in his early 30s and ending in 1797 when he was 65. They demonstrate well his creativity in musical structures, and his harmonic adventurousness. Charles Rosen described them with the Mozart concertos as 'the most brilliant piano works before Beethoven'. The emphasis on the piano is apt, since the cello very often doubles the keyboard bass, compensating for the thin lower register of contemporary pianos. Indeed Rosen goes so far as to say that Haydn's piano trios 'are not chamber music in the usual sense, but works for solo piano, solo violin and accompanying cello.' Older editions of tonight's early B-flat trio describe it as a Divertimento for piano and violin with *ad libitum* cello. Although the cello does indeed double the bass line of the piano rather than providing an additional melodic voice, it is a gratifying part to play.

In the first movement, which like many of its peers is in a measured *Allegro moderato*, the piano and violin have an engaging dialogue, echoing, replying to and commenting on each other's proposals. In the Menuet the piano and violin are often a third apart with the violin below the piano. As Rosen points out, this ordering was more appropriate for the relatively less piercing sound of the contemporary violin. The good-natured dialogue between the two instruments returns in the *Presto* last movement.

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) Hungarian Rhapsody No. 9 'Carnival in Pest' (1847)

c. 12 mins.

This piece was composed around the time that the 35-year old Liszt started a new period in his life. Since 1832 he had been living with the married Marie d'Agoult with whom he had had three children (including Cosima – Wagner's future wife). Partly thanks to his frantic, albeit extremely successful, touring schedule his relationship with Marie had deteriorated. It finally broke in 1844 after which they only corresponded. Liszt continued to tour widely throughout the next three years, but while touring in Kiev in February 1847, he met the (already married) Polish Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. He remained close friends with her for the rest of his life.

Carolyne recognised that Liszt's touring was exhausting him and advised him to stop giving concerts and instead concentrate on composition. He took her advice and gave his last concert on Sept 14, 1847. By the following June he had settled permanently in Weimar as Kapellmeister.

Liszt's nineteen Hungarian Rhapsodies were originally written for solo piano, but tonight's 9th was soon transcribed for piano trio by Liszt himself. Liszt dedicated it to the Moravian violinist Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst, one of the most brilliant virtuosos of his time and an avidly persistent disciple of Paganini: Liszt's own role model for modern virtuosity. Ernst would hide away in the room next to Paganini's for days on end listening to the master practise and memorising his unpublished pieces for use in Ernst's own concerts. Although Paganini was deeply impressed by Ernst's playing, he didn't like having either his compositions or his thunder stolen.