

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

8 May 2022 – 4pm

ELODIE CHOUSMER-HOWELLES & STELLA MARIE LORENZ

Violin

Piano

PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

Beethoven (1770 – 1827): Violin Sonata No. 5 in F major, Op. 24

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio molto espressivo
- III. Scherzo: Allegro molto
- IV. Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

This, Beethoven's fifth violin sonata, was the first to break away from the Classical three-movement sonata format. It was a tentative breach, though; the new Scherzo is barely more than a minute long. The work breaks with the eighteenth century in other ways, particularly in the lyricism that suffuses each movement.

The opening Allegro begins with one of those generously lyrical themes, sung by the violin over delicate keyboard accompaniment. A second theme group is busier and more clouded, but the soft sunlight soon returns in the curvaceous opening melody. In the development section, Beethoven uncharacteristically gives equal attention to all

his themes, but he casts the opening tune in a minor key, maintaining an unsettled feeling throughout the section.

The slow movement, Adagio molto espressivo, shifts to the key of B flat and a deeply pensive mood. The piano first presents the nostalgic melody, upon which the violin then meditates for a while. The two instruments then engage in a gentle dialogue based on this theme. The witty third movement, Scherzo & Trio, Allegro molto, begins and ends with a brief stop-and-start tune, with the violin deliberately out of sync with the piano. In the middle comes a very brief, skittering passage for both instruments. The final movement is far more substantial. A Rondo marked Allegro ma non troppo, it begins in a pleasant, rather courtly Mozartean style. This refrain returns in various guises, though never significantly altered; in between are minor mode passages of some agitation and modest drama, although the sunny disposition of the main wins out.

Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958): The Lark Ascending - A Romance

The Lark Ascending is a short, single-movement work inspired by the 1881 poem of the same name by the English writer George Meredith. Though perhaps we know the work in a setting for violin and orchestra, it was originally for violin and piano, completed in 1914, but not performed until 1920. Thus, this afternoon we are hearing the piece in its original form. The composer reworked it for solo violin and orchestra after the First World War.

It is subtitled "A Romance", a term that Vaughan Williams favoured for contemplative slow music.

The work has gained considerable popularity in Britain and elsewhere and has been much recorded between 1928 and the present day. Of all English music it is perhaps the music which most accurately captures the English countryside in all its late spring glory.

Brahms (1833 – 1897): Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 100

- I. Allegro amabile
- II. Andante tranquillo – Vivace – Andante – Vivace di più – Andante – Vivace
- III. Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante)

The Sonata was written while spending the summer of 1886 in Thun in the Bernese Oberland, Switzerland.

It was a very fertile and refreshing time for Brahms. His friend, the Swiss pastor and poet Josef Victor Widmann (1842–1911), lived in Berne and they visited each other. He was also visited by the poet Klaus Groth and the young German contralto Hermine Spies. Both Groth and Brahms were somewhat enamoured of Spies. He found himself so invigorated by the genial atmosphere and surroundings that he said the area was "so full of melodies that one has to be careful not to step on any". In a short space of time, he produced, in addition to this violin sonata, the Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major, Op. 99, the Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101, and various songs.

The second Violin Sonata is the shortest and is considered the most lyrical of Brahms's three violin sonatas. It is also

considered the most difficult of the three to bring off successfully, and to exhibit its balance of lyricism and virtuosity. It maintains a radiant, happy mood throughout.

By giving the work the formal title of "Sonata for Piano and Violin", rather than the more usual "Sonata for Violin and Piano", Brahms indicated the piano part was just as important as the violin part. In keeping with this, he allowed the piano to announce the opening theme.

The first three notes of the first movement are very similar in both melody and harmony to the first three notes of "Walther's Prize Song" (Morgendlich leuchtend im rosigen Schein) from Richard Wagner's opera Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Although they were musical rivals, Brahms was a great admirer of Wagner's music, but whether this was a deliberate quotation on Brahms's part is open to speculation. Nevertheless, the sonata has often been subtitled the "Meistersinger" Sonata. It is also sometimes called the "Thun" Sonata from the place of its creation. (*Wikipedia*)

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Rebecca Clarke (1886 – 1979): Midsummer Moon for Violin and Piano

Born in 1886 in Harrow, northwest London, to a German mother and an American father, Clarke had a difficult childhood. She was extremely close with her mother, Agnes, but had a strained and complex relationship with her father, Joseph.

Like many middle-class fathers of his generation, Joseph wanted to nurture family music-making, being an amateur cellist himself. When they were old enough, his children were given violin lessons – Rebecca, being ‘only a girl’, was sent to her brother Hans’s violin lessons rather than being taught individually. She hated playing the violin, and there were no indications that she would have any kind of musical career.

Despite this inauspicious start, as a teenager Clarke developed a real appreciation for the music her father forced her to play. In music, she found an escape from her family life. At 16, with her mother accompanying her at the

piano, she auditioned for the Royal Academy of Music, securing herself a place as a violin student. After just two years, however, her father removed her from the Academy after her harmony teacher proposed to her. She later attended the Royal College of Music, where she was taught composition by Charles Stanford. When she was composing at her best, Clarke felt ‘flooded with a wonderful feeling of potential power – a miracle that made anything seem possible’.

Much of Clarke’s music was never published and remains the property of her estate. Her difficulties in publishing the Piano Trio, documented in her diaries, may have discouraged her from pursuing publication of later works. Although she has been identified as among the most important British composers of the interwar years, a complete understanding of her significance will only be reached when more of her music is available for study.

Amy Beach (1867 – 1944): Romance

Amy Beach's Romance for Violin and Piano came relatively early in her career. It was composed in 1893 and dedicated to the then famous American violinist Maud Powell. Beach and Powell premiered the work in the year that it was composed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. It is in three sections with the melodies shared by both players.

Amy studied piano with several at the time well-known piano teachers, including Ernst Perabo and Kal Baermann, but with regard to composition she was almost entirely self-taught. She made her concert debut at the age of 16. Two years later, she married a physician 24 years her senior, Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach. During her lifetime, she was known neither by her maiden name nor

her own given name but as “Mrs. H.H.A. Beach.” That this was so, one must remember that this was the practice at the time and even the most celebrated actresses in Britain and America were known by their husband’s names. It was only after his death in 1910 that she embarked on a concert tour of both Europe and America.

She wrote in most genres and was the first American woman to write a symphonic work. Ultimately, she was considered one of America’s leading composers and the only female composer to be ranked alongside of Arthur Foote, George Chadwick, Edward MacDowell, and Horatio Parker. Her writing is in a late Romantic idiom, showing the influence of Brahms and Cesar Franck.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Violinist **Elodie Chousmer-Howelles** is establishing herself as one of the most versatile young musicians of her generation. She was recently awarded the Len Lickorish Memorial Prize for ‘a string player of promise’ in the string final of the 2021 Royal Overseas League competition. Upcoming concerto performances will see her as soloist with The Orchestra of St. John’s Smith Square in Coleridge-Taylor’s violin concerto and The Brentwood Philharmonic Orchestra in Glazunov’s violin concerto. Last year’s calendar included noteworthy performances, leading the Chineke! Quartet for the 2020 Booker Prize ceremony, and collaborations with high profile pop artists, including 2020 Mercury Prize-winning singer-songwriter Michael Kiwanuka, Becky Hill, Kano and Freya Ridings.

A 2018 BBC Young Musician category finalist, the following year saw her make her BBC Radio 3 debut with The BBC Singers, performing an arrangement of 'The Lark Ascending', for solo violin and mixed choir. Elodie has showcased her talents in a variety of musical settings, including appearing at the opening show of BBC One's 2019 Strictly Come Dancing season. Chamber performances have taken her to The House of Lords, Wigmore Hall and the Royal Albert Hall's Elgar Room.

A Calleva Trust Scholar at The Royal Academy of Music, Elodie is currently under the tutelage of Sasha Sitkovetsky and is now in her final year of undergraduate study. She began violin studies with Michael Gurevich and Jan Repko at The Chetham’s School of Music. She later went on to study with Maciej Rakowski and in 2017, was chosen to lead the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. She has received guidance from distinguished artists; Chloë Hanslip and Nicola Benedetti.

Stella Marie Lorenz is a German chamber musician and song accompanist who has performed on international stages in Germany, Austria (Konzerthaus Wien, Musikverein Wien), France, Spain and the UK, at The Leeds International Concert Series and the Wigmore Hall. In Vienna, she was awarded a Master of Vocal Accompaniment with first class distinction at the University of Music and Performing Arts. Having previously studied with Roger Vignoles, Gerold Huber and Markus Hadulla, she has participated in master classes with Graham Johnson, Helmut Deutsch and Christa Ludwig.

Stella is passionate to juxtapose the known and unknown in classical music, encouraging listeners to engage and discover new music. Regularly playing classical standards alongside 20th/21st century music, she has performed several world premieres.

In 2021, she was awarded the Historical Female Composer Prize, a Help Musicians Postgraduate Award and was named, A Young Artist at the Leeds Lieder Festival.

We hope that you will join us at our Jubilee Concert on 5 June, and on 2 April, 16 April and 7 May 2023