

Lammermuir Festival

Autumn Special

Online from 13 September 2020, 8:00pm | Holy Trinity Church, Haddington

Navarra String Quartet

Magnus Johnston violin I • Marije Johnston violin II
Clare Finnimore viola • Brian O'Kane cello

with

Tom Poster piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Adagio in B Minor, K. 540

Benjamin Britten String Quartet No. 3

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major, K. 414



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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Adagio in B Minor, K. 540

Mozart's sublime **Adagio, K. 540** is something of an enigma. While it could easily have been a slow movement to one of Mozart's later sonatas, it exists alone, with no indication of its provenance. Mozart listed it in his personal catalogue dated 19 March 1788, suggesting it was probably written in Vienna. B minor was a relatively rare key for Mozart, and the Adagio has all the qualities of a fantasia, as he explores the different permutations of his beautiful opening melody throughout the piece. But no formal analysis is really necessary — this simply is one of Mozart's most direct, touching works, of any genre.

Benjamin Britten String Quartet No. 3

1. Duets: *With moderate movement*
2. Ostinato: *Very fast*
3. Solo: *Very calm*
4. Burlesque: *Fast, con fuoco*
5. Recitative and Passacaglia (*La Serenissima*): *Slow*

Written during the autumn of 1975 in Aldeburgh and Venice, Benjamin Britten's **String Quartet No. 3** was to be one of the composer's final works. During the period between his heart surgery in May 1973 and his death in December 1976, Britten enjoyed a period of intense productivity, focusing his attention away from orchestral and operatic toward the smaller scale. Despite having been a capable viola player and finding an almost unique ability for making imaginative ideas work idiomatically for stringed instruments, Britten had not written a quartet for some thirty years.

Describing the third quartet, Hans Keller (to whom Britten dedicated it), suggested that in it Britten had taken 'that decisive step beyond — into the Mozartian realm of the instrumental purification of opera...' What Keller was alluding to is the fact that, despite the absence of any voices, opera seems to be present in almost every bar of the quartet — particularly Britten's opera, *Death in Venice*, which he completed in 1973. The third quartet's musical language is knotty, to say the least, as Britten plays a series of tonal and rhythmical games. As a whole, the five movements make up a symmetrical arch form centred around the third 'solo' movement, with each movement itself being in A-B-A ternary. The recitative that prefaces the concluding passacaglia quotes explicitly from *Death in Venice*. Some critics have suggested that Britten was consciously making allusions to the redemption of Aschenbach, the protagonist of Thomas Mann's novel on which the opera is based, and with whom the composer was known to have identified. The title of the closing movement, *La Serenissima*, is a nod to historical Venice; Britten travelled there while working on the final section, immersing himself in its ambience and soundworld. After the work's completion, Britten worked with the Amadeus Quartet during September 1976 to prepare for the premiere, which was scheduled for the December. Sadly, however, he never heard it in concert, dying just a fortnight beforehand.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major, K. 414

1. Allegro
2. Andante
3. Allegretto

Mozart's **Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major, K. 414** was composed during the autumn of 1782, one a group of three for the Vienna concert season. Mozart had never published any of his piano concertos previously — and, in fact, never would. He first attempted to publish this set himself and tried to raise the funds via subscription. An advert described how 'Herr Mozart, Kapellmeister' (a slightly misleading title, as Mozart had no institutional ties at the time) was preparing to issue 'three recently completed piano concertos that may be performed not only with an accompaniment of large orchestra and winds, but also *a quattro*, that is, with two violins, viola and violoncello.' This episode is revealing in that it shows Mozart trying to make money by providing his concertos in a more practical format, that would have been performable in domestic situations, rather than requiring lavish orchestral forces. Unfortunately, however, Mozart had less entrepreneurial acumen than musical ability, and his efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. In any case, the concertos were published by the Viennese publisher Artaria in 1785.

Writing to his father in December 1782, Mozart described how:

These concertos are a happy medium between what is too easy and too difficult; they are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear, and natural, without being vapid. There are passages here and there from which the connoisseurs alone can derive satisfaction; but these passages are written in such a way that the less learned cannot fail to be pleased, though without knowing why.

K. 414 exemplifies Mozart's aspirations to appeal to audiences, perhaps even more than its two companions. There is indeed always something pleasing to the ear — the first movement introduces at least six distinct themes between the quartet and piano, which are all melded together via a series of masterful transitions. The theme of the central Andante makes a direct quotation from Johann Christian Bach's overture for *La calamità de' cuori* (1763), adapting its opening motif into a classically singing Mozartian melody. Mozart had apparently initially considered a different movement to close the concerto from the one heard in this version (the alternative movement became the Rondo K. 386, posthumously published on its own). However, this Allegretto, with its sweeping opening theme, is far from being second-rate and validates all of Mozart's claims to his father. The interaction between the piano and strings is always masterfully judged, with not a single phrase outstaying its welcome. And this brilliance is only amplified by hearing the concerto in its *a quattro* version, as the piano becomes — paradoxically — an even more equal partner in the musical discourse.

David Lee

Tom Poster is a musician whose skills and passions extend well beyond the conventional role of the concert pianist. In demand internationally as soloist and chamber musician across an unusually extensive repertoire, he has been described as 'a marvel, [who] can play anything in any style' (*The Herald*), 'mercurially brilliant' (*The Strad*), and as having 'a beautiful tone that you can sink into like a pile of cushions' (*BBC Music*).

Since his London concerto debut at the age of 13, Tom has appeared in a wide-ranging concerto repertoire of over 40 major works. Equally at home in the high-octane virtuosity of Rachmaninov or Ligeti as directing Mozart and Beethoven from the piano, Tom has appeared as soloist with the Aurora Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony, China National Symphony, English Chamber Orchestra, European Union Chamber Orchestra, London Mozart Players, Hallé, Royal Philharmonic, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, St Petersburg State Capella Philharmonic and Ulster Orchestra, collaborating with conductors such as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Nicholas Collon, Thierry Fischer, James Loughran, En Shao, Robin Ticciati and Yan Pascal Tortelier. Two major new concertos have recently been written for Tom: David Knotts' *Laments and Lullabies*, commissioned by the Presteigne Festival; and Martin Suckling's Piano Concerto, commissioned by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. In 2018, Tom made his debut with the Philharmonia at the Royal Festival Hall.

Tom features regularly on BBC radio and television and has made multiple appearances at the BBC Proms. His exceptional versatility has put him in great demand at festivals, and those with which he has enjoyed close associations include the Aberystwyth, Cambridge, Hatfield House, North Norfolk, Oxford Lieder, Presteigne, Roman River, Spoleto, Two Moors and Weesp Festivals, and IMS Prussia Cove. He is a regular performer at Wigmore Hall, and is pianist of the Aronowitz Piano Trio and the Aronowitz Ensemble (former BBC New Generation Artists), appearing at the Concertgebouw and the Aldeburgh, Bath and Cheltenham Festivals. Tom enjoys established duo partnerships with Alison Balsom, Guy Johnston, and Elena Urioste, with whom he makes his debut at New York's Carnegie Hall in 2018. He also collaborates with Ian Bostridge, Laura van der Heijden, Steven Isserlis and Huw Watkins, and has performed piano quintets with the Brodsky, Callino, Carducci, Castalian, Danish, Elias, Endellion, Heath, Martinu, Medici, Navarra, Sacconi, Skampa and Tippett Quartets.

Tom is increasingly in demand as a curator and innovative concert programmer. In 2017, he curated and performed in four concerts of French chamber music and song for BBC Radio 3 at the Roman River Festival, and held a major residency at Wilton's Music Hall, in which he featured as both pianist and composer. He is Artistic Director of the newly formed Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective, an ensemble with a flexible line-up and a commitment to diversity, whose forthcoming highlights include festivals throughout the UK and a series in Ischia in 2018.

Tom studied with Joan Havill at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and at King's College, Cambridge, where he gained a Double First in Music. He won First Prize at the Scottish International Piano Competition 2007, and the keyboard sections of the Royal Over-Seas League and BBC Young Musician of the Year Competitions in 2000.

As a composer, Tom's recent commissions include two pieces for Alison Balsom, *Turn to the Watery World!* and *The Thoughts of Dr May*, the latter recorded for Warner Classics; and *The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak*, a chamber opera for Wattle & Daub, which received a critically acclaimed three-week run at Wilton's Music Hall in 2017. A lifelong devotee of the Great American Songbook, Tom's arrangements of Gershwin, Cole Porter and others have been extensively performed, broadcast and recorded. Tom has also recently appeared on stage as conductor; cellist, recorder player; swanee-whistler and Reciter in Walton's *Façade*. His other passions include Indian food, redwood forests, yoga, contrabassoons, bright blue skies, wild freestyle dancing and animals with unusual noses.

Since its formation in 2002, the **Navarra Quartet** has built an international reputation as one of the most dynamic and poetic string quartets of today. Selected for representation by the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) from 2006 to 2010, they have been awarded the MIDEM Classique Young Artist Award, a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, a Musica Viva tour, and prizes at the Banff, Melbourne and Florence International String Quartet Competitions. The Navarra Quartet has appeared at major venues throughout the world including the Wigmore Hall, Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, the Sage Gateshead, Kings Place, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Esterházy Palace, Luxembourg Philharmonie, Berlin Konzerthaus, the Laeiszhalle in Hamburg and international festivals such as Bath, Aldeburgh, Lammermuir, Presteigne, Bergen, Grachten, Sandviken, Schwetzingen, Rheingau, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Aixen-Provence, Bellerive, Harrogate Chamber Music and the BBC Proms.

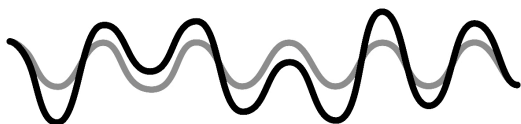
Further afield they have given concerts in Russia, the USA, China, Korea, Australia and the Middle East, and have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, RAI 3 (Italy), Radio 4 (Holland), SWR (Germany), Radio Luxembourg and ABC Classic FM (Australia). The Quartet collaborates with artists such as Li-Wei, Guy Johnston, Mark Padmore, Allan Clayton, Francesco Piemontesi, John O'Connor, Simone Young and the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

Highly-acclaimed recordings include Haydn's *Seven Last Words* for Altara Records and a disc of Pēteris Vasks' first three String Quartets for Challenge Records, which they recorded whilst working closely with the composer himself. The recording was described by critics as 'stunning', 'sensational' and 'compelling', and was nominated for the prestigious German Schallplattenkritik Award. More recently, the Navarra Quartet recorded a disc for NMC Records featuring the music of Joseph Phibbs, and future recording plans include Schubert's late quartets.

Formed at the Royal Northern College of Music, they commenced their studies under the guidance of the late Dr Christopher Rowland. Their development continued with studies in Cologne with the Alban Berg Quartet, Pro-Quartet in Paris, the International Musicians Seminar at Prussia Cove and from residencies at the Britten-Pears School in Aldeburgh and at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. A constant desire to evolve sees the Quartet play regularly to revered musicians such as Eberhard Feltz, Ferenc Rados and Gabor Takacs Nagy. The Navarra Quartet are dedicated to teaching the next generation of musicians in masterclasses and summer courses, and they recently completed a three-year residency as the Associated Ensemble at the Birmingham Conservatoire.

The Quartet plays on a Hieronymus II Amati violin, a Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume violin (kindly loaned to Marije by a generous sponsor through the Beares International Violin Society), and a Grancino cello made in Milan in 1698, generously on loan from the Cruft - Grancino Trust, administered by the Royal Society of Musicians.

Recent highlights include their US debut at New York's Lincoln Center; performances at the Southbank Centre's International Chamber Music and Leeds International Chamber Music Series, as well as tours of Ireland, the Netherlands and Scotland. The Navarra Quartet received the prestigious Dutch Kersjes prize in December 2017 in the Royal Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. Highlights in 2019/20 include a tour of Ireland, returns to Champs Hill and Wigmore Hall and their debut at the Heidelberg String Quartet Festival. They also play chamber music in Cuenca, Eastbourne, Evosges and Alfriston, and proudly direct the seventh edition of their Weesp Chamber Music Festival.



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