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A “virtual” Coffee Concert recorded at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford

Available from Sunday August 30, 2020 at 11:15

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We very much hope you enjoy this concert. If you would like to become a patron of the Oxford Coffee Concerts or make a donation to help support our exciting “virtual” concert project, please get in touch with us via the contact page at coffeeconcerts.com.

This the second of three virtual Coffee Concerts recorded on July 24, 2020. Further concerts will be recorded and streamed from 11:15 on Sunday mornings throughout autumn. (They will also be available for a limited time after release.)

Alice Neary (cello) and David Adams (violin)

- **Bach: Cello Suite no 3 in C major, BWV 1009**
- **Ravel: Sonata for Violin and Cello**
- **Handel/Halvorsen: Passacaglia in G Minor for Violin and Viola (arranged for violin and cello)**

Alice Neary (cello)

Winner of the 1998 Pierre Fournier Award and major prizes in the 2001 Leonard Rose Competition in the United States and the 1997 Adam International Cello Competition in New Zealand, Alice Neary has appeared as a soloist with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Israel Symphony and in recitals at the Wigmore Hall and Bridgewater Hall. She has broadcast extensively on BBC Radio 3 and NPR in America and recorded Tovey’s Cello Concerto with the Ulster Orchestra.

Alice is a member of the Gould Piano Trio and has appeared as guest cellist with the Nash Ensemble, Endellion and Elias quartets. She studied with Ralph Kirshbaum at the Royal Northern College of Music and, as a Fulbright scholar, with Timothy Eddy in the United States. She now teaches at the Royal College of Music in London and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

David Adams (violin)

David Adams began his studies at the age of five with his father, who was principal viola with the Hallé Orchestra. David continued his training with Malcolm Layfield at Chetham’s School of Music and the Royal Northern College of Music, and then in the USA with Zvi Zeitlin and Daniel Phillips.

David is now leader of Welsh National Opera (WNO) Orchestra and tutor in violin at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama.

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Having previously performed with the London Bridge Trio as guest violist, he was invited to join the trio as their new violinist in 2017. Passionate about chamber music, David has also been a member of the Raphael Ensemble and Ovid Ensemble.

David has made regular guest appearances, recordings and broadcasts on both violin and viola with the Nash Ensemble, the Endellion String Quartet, the Gould Piano Trio and the Hebrides Ensemble, and has recorded the complete Brahms Piano Quartets with the Gould Piano Trio. He has performed at the Winchester Festival, Leeds International Chamber Music Series and Cowbridge Music Festival as well as appearing as guest leader of many top symphony and chamber orchestras including the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He aslo regularly attends the International Musicians Seminar at Prussia Cove and

In his role with the WNO Orchestra, David has performed several concertos by the likes of Mozart, Beethoven and Bach. With his wife Alice Neary, he is an artistic director of the Penarth Chamber Music Festival, which takes place each July on Penarth Pier.

Suite for Solo Cello No 3 in C, BWV 1009
by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
1. Prelude; 2. Allemande; 3. Courante; 4. Sarabande; 5. Bourée 1 & 2; 6. Gigue.

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When Bach arrived in Cöthen (about 30 miles/48 Km north-west of Leipzig) in December 1717 to take up the post of Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold, he entered a rather different musical environment from the one he had left in Weimar. There his energies were focused mainly on large-scale organ music and church cantatas. The chapel at Cöthen, by contrast, followed a strict Calvinist tradition which left little scope for church music. Secular music, on the other hand, flourished at Leopold's court. He himself was an accomplished musician who sang, and played the violin, viola da gamba and harpsichord. Much of Bach's instrumental music – though seemingly not as much as was once thought – dates from his time at Cöthen.

This probably includes his six suites for solo cello, although some may originate from his time in Weimar. But that is virtually all we know about their origins. There is no hard evidence to show why, or for whom, they were written. One suggestion is that they were composed for Christian Ferdinand Abel, cellist at Cöthen, whose son, Carl Friedrich, would later go into partnership with Bach's youngest son, Johann Christian, in promoting a prestigious series of concerts in London between 1765 and 1781.

Although the suites were never completely neglected after Bach's death, it was only when the Spanish cellist Pablo Casals encountered them in the 1890s and began playing them in public (after a long period spent studying them away from the limelight), that they started to acquire the level of appreciation they enjoy today. They are now acknowledged as one of the foundations of the cello repertoire.

The suite of Bach's day (for whatever instrumental medium) took the basic form of four contrasting dance movements: allemande, courante, sarabande and gigue. A prelude was often added and, occasionally, extra dances between the sarabande and gigue. This is the outline of Bach's

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instrumental suites, although he followed it more consistently in the suites for cello than in those for orchestra, or the partitas for keyboard or solo violin.

The allemande, a basically slow dance with a florid melodic line, was considered serious, even solemn, while the courante, in a moderate triple time, was regarded as grand and majestic. The sarabande probably originated in Spain, then moved to Italy where it made a colourful, exotic effect, often played with castanets and guitars. Louis XIV's dancing masters transformed it into a more dignified, expressive dance in slow triple time; by Bach's time it had acquired a profoundly introspective character. The extra movement in Suite No 3 consists of a pair of bourées, the bourée being a lively dance in a fast duple time, originally from rural France. The gigue is lively and spirited.

Sonata for Violin and Cello
by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
1. Allegro; 2. Très vif; 3. Lent; 4. Vif, avec entrain.

The December 1920 issue of the French music journal La Revue Musicale was given over to a commemoration of Debussy, who had died two years before. A special supplement included short memorial pieces by Bartók, Falla, Satie and Stravinsky, among others. Ravel's contribution, a Duo for violin and cello, became the first movement of this Sonata; the remaining movements were added during the following two years and the completed work was dedicated to Debussy's memory.

Ravel himself acknowledged that the Sonata marked a turning-point in his development. He was clearly taking note of developments in the music of composers such as Bartók, Schoenberg and Stravinsky; the Sonata is marked by gritty counterpoint and a harmonic pungency which is often the result of bitonality (writing in two keys simultaneously). As he put it: "The music is stripped to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and increasingly there is a return to emphasis on melody."

The first movement opens with one of Ravel's typically cool, poised themes, but the cello soon introduces a more disruptive idea which is to recur in each of the other movements; its angular outline sets it apart from the work's other main themes.

Ravel was dissatisfied with the original second movement and withdrew it. Its replacement is a driving scherzo with an almost percussive use of pizzicato. Much of the material suggests Hungarian influence, notably a theme in the middle section built from long-held notes ending in sudden decorative flourishes.

The slow movement is the most lyrical of the four. After a while the angular idea from the first movement whips up a short-lived storm, but the opening music returns, with both instruments muted, to end the movement gently. The finale ("lively, with gusto") is a robust piece – Ravel wanted the cellist to start by bouncing the bow off the strings "like a mechanical rabbit" – with more themes in Hungarian style and a teasing metrical complexity which gives the music a certain wayward quality.

The Sonata is, perhaps, a surprisingly astringent work for Ravel. As though wary of the public's eventual reaction he affected to

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dismiss it as “this machine for two instruments” (echoing the 'mechanical rabbit' comment). His friend the critic Alexis Roland-Manuel summed up its emotional world, paradoxically, as “lyricism which spits like an angry cat”. Since Ravel was fascinated by mechanical contraptions of all kinds, and loved cats, both remarks are, in their way, entirely apt.

Passacaglia for Violin and Cello
by Johan Halvorsen (1864-1935) (“freely, after Handel”)

One of the major figures in Norwegian music during the years around the turn of the 20th century, Halvorsen spent much of his career working in the theatre as both composer and conductor. He directed the music at the National Theatre in Christiania (Oslo) between 1899 and 1929, providing music for more than thirty plays. The only work of his which is at all well-known in this country, Entry March of the Boyars, comes from one of his theatre scores.

After retiring from the theatre, Halvorsen was able to spend more time composing, producing three symphonies, among other works. He also had an international concert career as a conductor, performing Norwegian music to European audiences, and introducing the music of Debussy and Nielsen to Norway.

In addition, he was a skilled violinist, studying with two of the greatest teachers of the time, Adolf Brodsky and Leopold Auer. This, combined with an interest in folk music, led to his absorption in collecting, transcribing and publishing the repertory of Norway’s distinctive folk-instrument, the Hardanger fiddle.

He wrote his Passacaglia in 1897, one of three pieces for violin and viola (in this case the cello is given as an alternative) based on music by Handel. Its starting-point is the last movement of his harpsichord suite in G minor, No 7 in his first volume of suites, published in 1720. It begins as a straightforward transcription of the original,

consisting of continuous variations on a four-bar chord sequence. The work gradually becomes freer in style until, at the point where the music suddenly slows down, and the harmonies become more like what we would expect to hear from Grieg, Halvorsen and Handel have decisively parted company. From this point the music gradually accumulates momentum and brilliance, with the final section, marked allegro con fuoco (quick and fiery), providing an equivalent to Handel’s virtuoso figuration, in a brilliant tour-de-force for both instruments.

Coming soon – More virtual concerts

Released on Sunday September 13, our next virtual Coffee Concert features Tim Horton (piano) playing Beethoven’s Six Bagatelles, op 126 and Schubert’s Piano Sonata no 20 in A major, D 959. We expect to record three further Coffee Concerts in September and hope to start streaming every week from the beginning of October.