

Ilkley Concert Club



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King's Hall

Wednesday 14th February 2018

SEPTURA





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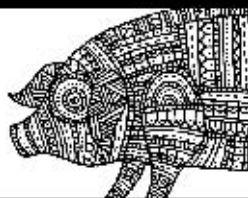
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TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME

Bridging La Manche

Josquin

Ave Maria

Parsons

Ave Maria

Rameau

Suite from Dardanus

Purcell

The Curious Impertinent

INTERVAL

(Coffee, tea and bar facilities available in the Winter Garden)

Debussy

Six Préludes

Parry

Songs of Farewell

Ravel

Trois Chansons

Vaughan Williams

The Turtle Dove

(All music is a first performance at ICC)

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PROGRAMME NOTES

Bridging La Manche:

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité and the island nations of classical music

Standing together at the edge of Europe, France and England share inextricably intertwined geopolitical histories: in turns ruled together, fighting each other, competing for empire, and joined in war against a common enemy. And they are also linked by a strange relationship with the European classical tradition: both have had some composers at the very forefront of their art, the greats amongst their contemporaries; but there have also been droughts – huge swathes of music history, most noticeably the all-important classical and early romantic periods, in which neither nation has produced any composers of note.

Our geography makes artistic similarities inevitable, and it's also easy to see why these two stand outside of the mainstream: Britain is an island nation, set apart from mainland Europe; and France has a sustained history of warring with its Teutonic neighbours.

This programme compares contemporary composers from the high-points in both musical and political histories: the early polyphony of Josquin des Prez and Robert Parsons; the Lully-influenced opera of Purcell and Rameau; turn-of-the-century Parry and Debussy, who both died in 1918; and their successors Ravel and Vaughan Williams.

JOSQUIN DES PREZ (c.1450/1455-1521)

***Ave Maria* (arr. Simon Cox)**

We begin in 16th-century France with Josquin des Prez, who was widely regarded as the greatest composer of the age – a trailblazer of the early Renaissance. One of his innovations was to write motets for 6 voices (as in this example of the *Ave Maria*) rather than the standard 4. Josquin's motets vary hugely in style – from strict homophonic settings to elaborate contrapuntal ones. This *Ave Maria* is in this middle of that spectrum, with sections of flowing polyphony contrasted with declamatory passages for important parts of the text.

ROBERT PARSONS (c.1535-c.1572)

***Ave Maria* (arr. Matthew Knight)**

A generation later in England, Robert Parsons penned his extraordinarily beautiful setting of the *Ave Maria*, by far his best known work. Parsons became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1563, and wrote much music for that choir. That he should reserve his best music for this Latin Marian hymn – a mainstay of the Catholic tradition – perhaps suggests where his sympathies lay in the

Protestant regime of Elizabeth I. Parsons' response to this text is a work of serene counterpoint that reaches its pinnacle in a rapturous Amen, before coming to rest in the reassuring warmth of F major – a perfect key for brass instruments.

**JEAN-PHILLIPPE RAMEAU Suite from Dardanus (arr. Simon Cox)
(1683-1764) Overture | Marche | Menuet | Tambourin**

Inheriting the well-established operatic tradition from Lully, Rameau became the principal composer of French opera, despite not composing his first opera until he was almost 50. Whilst the main plot of his 1739 opera Dardanus was so absurd (a convoluted love story with sea monsters, magicians and dream sequences) that it had to be extensively re-written after its premiere, the prologue, following a Lullian convention, is a straightforward allegory rooted in classical mythology. Cupid banishes Jealousy, but Love can't survive without her – Cupid and the Pleasures fall into a deep sleep, and Venus has to recall Jealousy to bring them all back to life. The classic 'French' overture, with its grandiose dotted-rhythm opening giving way to a compelling energetic movement, is a musical highlight of the opera; and as the mortals pay homage to Cupid through dance, Rameau's ballet music is especially colourful – demonstrating his revolutionary use of harmony, melodic and rhythmic quirks, and his range of emotional expression.

**HENRY PURCELL The Curious Impertinent (arr. Simon Cox)
(1659-1695) Overture | Hornpipe | Slow Air | Air
Trumpet Air | March | Hornpipe on a Ground**

Inspired by the first English opera – Blow's Venus & Adonis – Purcell composed the more celebrated Dido & Aeneas in 1689. But around this time he also produced a huge amount of music for so-called 'semi-operas' in which the characters speak their lines, with the drama accompanied by incidental music. In the final six years of his life Purcell wrote music for 42 such plays, one of which was the 1694 farce The Curious Impertinent, also known as The Married Beau. Unpublished until after Purcell's premature death in 1695, this collection of short movements is typical of his theatre suites, some numbers of which achieved the status of popular tunes in his lifetime. It features a two-part French overture in the Lullian style, with the energetic fugal second section substituting its initial subject with a second theme halfway through. Apart from an elegant, minuet-like slow air, the ensuing movements are decidedly more English than French, with two lively hornpipes, two breezy airs (the trumpet air particularly cheery), a jig, a stately march, and finally the most famous number, a hornpipe on a ground bass.

INTERVAL

(Coffee, tea and bar facilities available in the Winter Garden)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862-1918)

Six Préludes (arr. Simon Cox)

**Des pas sur la neige | La fille aux cheveux de lin
Minstrels | Général Lavine | Bruyères | La Cathédrale engloutie**

This year is the centenary of Debussy's death. He was already a celebrated composer – thanks to the success of his 1902 opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and his 1905 symphonic masterpiece *La Mer* – when he wrote his 24 *Préludes* for solo piano. He completely re-moulded this Chopinesque genre in his own inimitable programmatic style, re-creating 'scenes from my emotional life'. Divided into two books, they were written at an extremely fast pace (between December 1909 and April 1913). The *Préludes* all feature descriptive titles, placed at the end of the pieces rather than the start, so that they avoid being narrowly prescriptive for the performer, and allow the music to speak for itself first.

There is no indication that the *Préludes* are a strict set, to be played complete and in order, and early performances (including by Debussy himself) tended to group together three or four. We have chosen the six which translate the best to brass, affording us the opportunity to explore the myriads of colours without sacrificing any pianistic detail. We start with *Des pas sur la neige* (Footsteps in the snow, from Book 1), a stark and desolate winter scene. *La fille aux cheveux de lin* (The girl with the flaxen hair) contrasts an exotic pentatonic melody with the innocence of the very diatonic G-flat major harmony. *Minstrels* is the humorous finale of Book 1, and vividly portrays the many acts of a performing troupe – frantically shifting between dance, song and drumrolls. Book 2's *Général Lavine* – depicting a well-known American clown – is in a similarly comic vein. *Bruyères* (Heather) returns to the soundscape of *La fille*, reflecting pastoral nostalgia. Finally, returning to Book 1, *La Cathédrale engloutie* (The sunken cathedral) is the perfect impressionist image: the cathedral of Ys, sunk as a punishment for the impious citizens, rises from the sea each day at dawn.

HUBERT PARRY
(1848-1918)

Songs of Farewell (arr. Matthew Knight)

**My soul, there is a country
I know my soul hath power
Never weather-beaten sail | There is an old belief**

For Parry, who had always revered German music and culture, the First World War was deeply depressing; it was, in the words of Herbert Howells, 'a scourge that cast a devastating shadow over Parry's mind and heart'. He sensed that he was close to death: as he wrote on his 70th birthday, 'I have reached the last milestone', and like Debussy, he did in fact die in 1918. This is the context for his introspective *Songs of Farewell*, composed between 1916 and 1918. Parry himself labelled them motets, but only the last of the six songs has a traditional

sacred text; the rest are more personal than strictly devotional. Through the set Parry gradually expands his forces from 4 voices to 8, and with this expansion comes greater textural variety. We have arranged the first four: the opening two movements, *My soul, there is a country*, and *I know my soul*, are both in 4 parts and almost entirely homophonic. The 5-part *Never weather-beaten sail* starts out in the same vein, but soon gives way to counterpoint. Finally, *There is an old belief* is largely polyphonic, with a few instances of emphatic homophony.

MAURICE RAVEL **Trois Chansons (arr. Simon Cox)**
(1848-1918) **Nicolette | Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis | Ronde**

Ravel and Debussy are often cast as rivals, but they were actually friends for many years, and Ravel was a staunch admirer of the older pioneer: he attended the first thirty performances of *Pelleas et Mélisande*! Astonishingly, the *Trois Chansons* were the only piece of a cappella choral music that Ravel ever published. He wrote them whilst waiting to be enlisted in the army in 1914-15, and later transcribed them for solo voice and piano (the version we have used). Set to the composer's own texts, these are not really melodies (French art-song) but are written in the folk style of the chanson. Nevertheless, they contain a wealth of imaginative expression. The cheerful strophic verses of *Nicolette* use the same material to paint completely distinct pictures, as she flees from a wolf, dreamily falls for a handsome page, but then settles for a grotesque (but rich) old man. *Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis* provides a sombre contrast: with the refrain 'my beloved is away at war', it transforms a simple innocent melody into one of utter desolation, at the news of the beloved's death. *Ronde* returns to a humorous care-free folk style, energetically nagging as the young people are warned, in a seemingly endless list, of terrifying creatures to be found in the dark depths of the forest.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS **The Turtle Dove**
(1872-1958) **(arr. Matthew Knight)**

Vaughan Williams was perhaps the greatest of Parry's pupils, but he was also one of the few composers that Ravel agreed to teach. His output is hugely varied, with symphonies, operas, ballets, chamber music and choral music to his name. He was strongly associated with the revival of British folk song, the harmonies of which informed his style, and led to his very English compositional voice. *The Turtle Dove* is an arrangement of a folk-song that Vaughan Williams collected himself. Written in 1919, its intensely melancholic mood perhaps reflects the profound effect that the First World War, in which Vaughan Williams served in the army, had on his life and music.

Programme notes © Septura

SEPTURA

Trumpets: Huw Morgan, Alan Thomas, Simon Cox
Trombones: Matthew Gee, Matthew Knight, Daniel West
Tuba: Peter Smith

‘The standard is absolutely higher than brass playing has ever been before’.
Alison Balsom (BBC Radio 2)

Formed in 2012 by Simon Cox, the members of the brass septet, Septura, are the leading players of the new generation of British brass musicians, holding principal positions in the LSO, the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Basel Symphony and Aurora Orchestras. Together they are re-defining brass chamber music through the uniquely expressive sound of the brass septet. With a canon of repertoire including transcriptions, arrangements and new commissions for this brand new classical configuration, Septura aims to raise the profile of the brass ensemble as a serious artistic medium.

Currently Ensemble in Residence at the Royal Academy of Music, the group is recording a series of 10 discs for Naxos Records, each focused on a particular period, genre and set of composers. The first 5 discs have received critical acclaim, described variously as *‘brilliantly done’* (The Observer), *‘dazzlingly polished’* (BBC Music Magazine), *‘brass playing at its most exalted’* (Fanfare).

Following recent performances at the Cheltenham and Chipping Camden Festivals and at Kings Place in London, the 2017/18 season sees Septura launching their debut concert series, Kleptomania, at St John’s, Smith Square, and at the West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge. They will tour Switzerland and Germany, and, when you read these notes Septura will have just returned from a tour of the USA, (10 concerts in 10 days in 8 states), playing a brand new programme called *‘American in Paris’*, which explores the great transatlantic relationship between Ravel and Gershwin.

Simon Cox trumpet is the Founder and an Artistic Director of Septura. He is also Principal Trumpet of the Aurora Orchestra and regularly performs with many of the UK’s major orchestras. Following studies at King’s College, London, and the Royal Academy of Music, he spent three years in Finland as a member of Helsinki Philharmonic. He returned to the UK to embark on a PhD investigating the field of brass chamber music and developing repertoire for the brass septet. Simon runs the group with fellow artistic director Matthew Knight and produces many of Septura’s arrangements as well as handling most of its administration.

Huw Morgan *trumpet* won both the Prague Spring and Ellsworth Smith International Trumpet Competitions in 2016. He combines a burgeoning solo career with his role of Principal Trumpet in the Sinfonieorchester Basel. He has performed concertos with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the Northern Sinfonia and the Royal Flemish Philharmonic and regularly appears as guest principal with the London Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Alan Thomas *trumpet* has been Principal Trumpet with the BBC Symphony Orchestra since 2013. He is Professor of Trumpet at the Royal College of Music and trumpet tutor at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. In his spare time, he enjoys running, adventure races, going to British Military Fitness classes and spending time with his wife and children.

Matthew Knight *trombone* is the Artistic Director of Septura and Sub Principal Trombone in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He has appeared frequently as guest principal with almost all the UK's orchestras. Previously a member of the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester, he studied at the Royal Academy of Music having graduated with a starred first from Cambridge. As well as arranging for Septura, Matthew writes the group's programme notes and the sleeve notes for their Naxos recordings.

Matthew Gee *trombone* is Principal Trombone of the Royal Philharmonic and Aurora Orchestras. He juggles a busy work life that encompasses orchestral, session, chamber and solo playing. A graduate of King's College and the Royal College of Music, Matthew teaches at the Royal Academy of Music. He is also Chairman of the British Trombone Society and takes an active role in promoting the instrument.

Daniel West *trombone* was born in Canada. He studied at the University of North Texas and the Royal Academy of Music before embarking on a career which has seen him work with all of London's major orchestras as well as many others around the UK and Europe. Frequently recorded in sessions for film and TV, Dan is also a prominent contrabass trombonist.

Peter Smith *tuba* is originally from Oldham and studied at Chetham's School of Music followed by the Royal Academy of Music. He quickly established himself on the freelance scene with a varied schedule of work with groups such as the BBC Symphony Orchestra and London Brass. In 2008 Pete joined the Philharmonia Orchestra and is also a Professor at the Royal College of Music.

(Biographical notes assembled by Sarah Warnes)

CLUB NOTES

Replacing the ICC Honorary Secretary and Hospitality Organiser

Josephine Wesley is planning to step down as our Honorary Secretary and hospitality organiser in October 2018 after eight years performing these roles. Josephine's enthusiasm and diligence has been greatly appreciated by the Club and your Committee, especially in ensuring that the occasional bumps on the road to our concerts are smoothly negotiated.

To replace her we would like to recruit two new members to be part of the committee, one to take over as Honorary Secretary and the other to take responsibility for planning the concert day arrangements for the performers. No special knowledge is required for either task, you will pick it up as you go along, but confidence with the usual office skills is useful. Neither job is tied to a particular schedule and both would suit anyone either working or recently retired.

Honorary Secretary

The responsibilities cover the tasks of arranging, preparing agendas and taking minutes at the 3 committee meetings held each year and at the AGM, coordinating bookings for the Kings Hall, preparing artists' contracts and dealing with occasional tasks that inevitably occur. However, other members of the committee deal with planning the season's concerts, producing the brochure and concert day programmes, and ticket subscriptions and sales.

Hospitality Organiser

You will be responsible for liaising with the artists' agents and making arrangements for the concert to ensure the day runs smoothly. This may involve, organizing the moving and tuning of the piano and booking the page turner, as well as arranging meals and overnight accommodation for the artists. Contact with agents and artists gives an interesting insight to the life of a performer. The actual concert day responsibility of looking after artists is taken by other committee members.

Both jobs are fascinating and integral to the success of a club that has been presenting world class concerts in Ilkley for 72 Seasons, bringing much personal satisfaction and engagement with the local community. You will be joining a team of people dedicated to continuing the success of Ilkley Concert Club. In each case there is plenty of opportunity to use your own initiative but you would be given full support as you discover what is required.

If you are interested in either opportunity, do please have a talk to Josephine (01943 601248), vice-Chair Robert Templar (01943 601719) or myself to find out more.

David Wharmby – Chairman

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

There are very few commercial recordings available of Brass Septets, and Septura face virtually no competition with tonight's works.

In the circumstances I am listing the 6 CDs that the group has made for Naxos, indicating where any of tonight's works are featured.

The recording quality of all the mid-price discs is superb.

- Christmas with Septura – 8.573719 (Parsons)
- Volume 1 – 8.573314
- Volume 2 – 8.573386 (Purcell & Rameau)
- Volume 3 – 8.573475
- Volume 4 – 8.573526
- Volume 5 – 8.573619 (Ravel & Debussy)

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