



The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble

Wednesday, October 14, 2009

8 PM

Convocation Hall

University of Alberta

Kenneth Sillito, violin and leader
Harvey de Souza, violin
Jennifer Godson, violin
Martin Burgess, violin

Robert Smissen, viola
Duncan Ferguson, viola
Stephen Orton, cello
John Heley, cello

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble appears by arrangement with [David Rowe Artists](#)

String Sextet in B-flat major, Op. 18

Johannes Brahms
1833-1897

Allegro ma non troppo
Andante ma moderato (Variations)
Scherzo. (Allegro molto)
Rondo. (Poco allegretto e grazioso)

Prelude and Scherzo, Op. 11

Dmitri Shostakovich
1906-1975

Adagio
Allegro molto

*****INTERMISSION*****

Octet for Strings in E-flat major, Op. 20

Felix Mendelssohn
1809-1847

Allegro moderato, ma con fuoco
Andante
Scherzo (Allegro leggierissimo)
Presto

PROGRAM NOTES

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

String Sextet in B flat Op 18

Brahms was born in Hamburg and during a fairly impoverished childhood he developed a love of music and although he learnt to play stringed instruments from his father, it was the piano that attracted him. His first teacher was Friedrich Cossel, who realising that the young Johannes had great talent, passed him on to his own teacher, Eduard Marxen, from whom he learnt all the musical skills which would hone the techniques that he would use throughout his career.

During his youth he had played in bars and dens of ill repute but after meeting Remenyi (the violinist with whom he toured and Joachim who was to become his friend) he met Robert and Clara Schumann in 1853 as well as Liszt. His early compositions had attracted their attention and in 1857 he took up the post of teacher and conductor at the Court of Detmold where he began work on several chamber work amongst which was the Sextet in B flat.

This is the first in the medium and although it shows the influence of Beethoven and Haydn it is his own personality that always comes to the fore.

The 1st movement is an *Allegro ma non troppo*, the longest of the four, has three lyrical themes. The first cello takes up the first theme which is broad and expansive giving way to a waltz that leads to the second theme. This is also a waltz but more emotional and passionate and getting higher in pitch as it develops. The final theme opens with the violins and first viola after which all the subjects are developed in full and then followed by a recapitulation and brief coda with *pizzicato* ending

The 2nd movement is an *Andante, ma moderato* which is a set of six variations based on a Hungarian Gypsy melody in the austere key of D minor. It begins in the manner of Bach but is then developed and combined with the composer's own intense Romantic style with the cellos holding together the movement. This movement was arranged by Brahms for piano and dedicated to Clara Schumann and was also used by Louis Malle in his film *Les Amants* to accompany the love scene.

The 3rd movement, *Scherzo, Allegro Molto – Trio*, is brief, rustic and recalls Beethovenian fun with the trio being a reckless gallop.

The 4th movement, *Rondo, Poco allegretto e grazios*. This is in sonata form and recalls Mozart in its opening with a beautiful theme by the first cello with delicate accompaniment which goes through several transformations before climaxing in a *rondo* with again use of the *pizzicato*.

--notes by Chris Ross

Dmitri Shostakovitch Two pieces for String Octet Op 11

These two pieces for String Octet were written when Shostakovich was a student and shows an abundance of technical skill. The Scherzo has a satirical edge, the texture shot through with nose-thumbing glissandi and grinding dissonances which give a savage twist to apparently cheerful material. The second movement has a slow ascending theme on the cello which has to be played on one string and is then followed by a manic Presto with many percussive effects.

--notes by Stephen Orton

Felix Mendelssohn: Octet in E Flat, Op. 20

Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg in 1809 into a wealthy banking family and enjoyed an education encompassing many subjects taking piano lessons whilst his family was in Paris in 1816. He returned to Berlin and made his debut as a pianist at the age of nine and began to compose prolifically for various instruments and voices.

The Octet was written when he was sixteen and begins with a magnificent first movement with a soaring opening theme on the first violin with a shimmering semiquaver accompaniment and syncopations. The second subject is a much calmer beautiful melody which passes through various instruments before returning to the turbulent *con fuoco* first subject. The first movement is a delight to play for all instruments but particularly features a wonderful solo for the fourth violin in the second half which then sets up the mood for the return to the first subject in snake-like semiquavers weaving us back into E flat major.

The second movement is an Andante which has a haunting melody on cello and viola that quickly blossoms into a beautiful melody in the upper strings and then develops into a descending melody accompanied by a weaving triplet figure which then continues through the movement.

We then have a miracle of a movement in the Scherzo which is mostly played *pianissimo* and echoes the atmosphere of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" finishing with a breathtaking scale on the first violin.

The last movement is a Fugal Presto which passes from second cello to the top of the violins, and is more orchestral with many *tutti* passages and excerpts from the Scherzo finishing very triumphantly.

--notes by Stephen Orton

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The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields was formed in 1959 by a group of eleven enthusiastic musicians with the aim of performing in public without a conductor. Their first three recordings led to a succession of long-term contracts, and the Academy quickly took their place among the most recorded ensembles in history. As the repertoire expanded from Baroque to Mozart, Bartok and Beethoven, so it became necessary for the principal violin, Neville Marriner, to conduct the larger orchestra.

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble was created in 1967 to perform the larger chamber works—from quintets to octets—with players who customarily work together, instead of the usual string quartet with additional guests. Drawn from the principal players of the orchestra, the Chamber Ensemble tours as a string octet, string sextet, and in other configurations including winds. Its touring commitments are extensive, with annual visits to France, Germany, and Spain, and frequent tours to North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan.

The Ensemble's fall 2009 North American tour brought them to 15 cities, including (among others) Tacoma, Albuquerque, Des Moines, Dallas, Memphis, Purchase, NY, and Quebec.

Contracts with Philips Classics, Hyperion, and Chandos have led to the release of over thirty CDs by the Chamber Ensemble.

BIOGRAPHIES

Kenneth Sillito (violin, leader) has been Artistic Director of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields and leader of the Chamber Ensemble since 1980, taking the ensemble to new heights. He won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music at the age of 14, studying with David Martin. A further scholarship took him to Rome to study with Remy Principe. On returning to England he became associate leader of the English Chamber Orchestra, subsequently becoming leader until 1973. In 1967 Kenneth Sillito founded the Gabrieli String Quartet and remained their leader until 1987, during which time the Quartet gained an international reputation. In 1971 he was honored by being made a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music.

Harvey de Souza (violin) is a native of Bombay, India, and began musical studies at the age of four with his father. He was awarded a scholarship to attend the Yehudi Menuhin School in England, where he studied with Mr. Menuhin, Felix Andrievsky, and Margaret Norris. He subsequently studied at the Curtis Institute of Music with Jascha Brodsky and Felix Galamir. He has performed extensively throughout Europe, the U.S., China, and

India, and has participated in numerous festivals including Salzburg, Sienna, Gstaad, and Prussia Cove. He was a member of the Vellinger String Quartet from 1993-1999, and since 1993 has been a member of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields.

Jennifer Godson (violin) has been a member of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields since 1985. She is also principal second violin of the London Mozart Players and co-leader of John Eliot Gardiner's Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique. Much of her musical life has revolved around chamber music and she was a member of the Fairfield String Quartet from 1978-88, performing and broadcasting throughout the UK and Europe.

Martin Burgess (violin) has Played with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields since 1992, and recently made his debut as guest director. He studied with Emanuel Hurwitz and the Amadeus Quartet. Away from the Academy, Martin leads the Emperor String Quartet, which won 1st Prize at the 1995 Evian International String Quartet Competition and was recently nominated for a Grammy Award in the USA for their CD of the Quartets of William Walton.

Robert Smissen (viola) won a scholarship to Chethams School of Music at the age of 14, and went on to study at the Guildhall School of Music with David Takeno. While there he won prizes for chamber music and solo playing. After college he was appointed principal viola with the Northern Sinfonia, a post he held until 1986. He currently plays with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, as well as other London chamber orchestras.

Duncan Ferguson (viola) was born in Scotland, and won a scholarship for post-graduate study at the Royal Academy of Music after receiving his diploma from the Royal Scottish Academy in 1992. Primarily known as a chamber musician he is a multiple prize-winner for both solo performance and with the celebrated Medea Quartet with whom he played for five years. Duncan has been playing with the Academy since 1996 and acts as guest principal for many other orchestras including the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the English Chamber Orchestra.

Stephen Orton (cello) was born in Ripon, Yorkshire. He won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music to study with William Pleeth. He has been principal cello in the Bournemouth Sinfonietta and assistant principal in the English Chamber Orchestra, and has performed as soloist with both ensembles. He was a member of the Delme Quartet for 10 years, and joined the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields as principal cellist in 1986.

John Heley (cello) was born in London, and began playing cello at the age of six. He was awarded a scholarship to study with William Pleeth, and continued studies with Mr. Pleeth at the Guildhall School of Music where he won numerous prizes. In 1980 he left the post of associate principal cellist with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to concentrate on freelance work, which included recordings with guitarist John Williams. In 1986 he became associate principal cellist with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields.