

LUNCHBREAK CONCERT
In association with:
THE SOUND FESTIVAL
THE PRIMROSE PIANO QUARTET
THE COWDRAY HALL
Thursday, 03 November 2011

It is exactly a year since the Primrose Quartet made their second appearance at the Lunchbreak concert series in association with the sound festival on the 4th November 2010. As on their first visit the previous year, they included in their programme new music composed by their viola player Robin Ireland.

These were Scottish première performances of two of a series of pieces entitled *Pairings*, which bring together string players from the Quartet. The first of these to be performed was *Pairings III* for violin and viola. Being himself an accomplished string player and working regularly with other members of the string family, Robin Ireland knows intimately the playing capabilities, the sound potential and the range of instrumental colours of his chosen instruments. As a result, both pieces we heard on Thursday, no matter how adventurous, came across as being very happy and comfortable on those instruments.

The first piece, subtitled *Convergence*, was intended to bring together ethereal sounds on the upper register of the violin with more earthy tones on the viola. If the melodic outlines of this music were angular, they were no more so than in the music of Shostakovich or perhaps Britten and the result was both exciting in its technical accomplishment and very palatable indeed to listen to.

The second piece, *Pairings I* for viola and cello, had four movements, the first a take on the sonorities of the Bach solo cello sonatas. The second marked by precipitous slides and harmonics was entitled *Limbo*, while the third, *Chase*, had short moments of the kind of flurry sometimes heard in music for children's cartoons. The final movement entitled *Fanfare* was, according to Robin Ireland, partly inspired by the music of Benjamin Britten and at the beginning, I did indeed recall the textures and motion of one of the Four Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes.

The second part of the concert was devoted to a stunningly brilliant performance by the full Quartet of Fauré's *Piano Quartet in c minor, Op. 15*. The opening movement with its close textured imitative music in which the instruments in turn reflected one another's melodic patterns was played with loving warmth. The Scherzo began with pizzicato strings above a liquid piano part played magnificently by John Thwaites.

The movement as a whole was like a gentle summer breeze playfully chasing leaves across a garden. The softly melancholy Adagio suggested an elegy for some deeply felt loss and was movingly performed by the Quartet before the finale, Allegro Molto brought back elements of melodic reflections as in the opening and something of the chase from the Scherzo. It built to a passionate climax with the piano part given the kind of dazzling fireworks normally reserved for a concerto.

The Primrose Piano Quartet seems to be booking in as a regular attraction for the Lunchbreak Series and Sound. I for one certainly hope so.

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