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## Welcome to our newsletter

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of the Chamber Music Club Newsletter. We hope you will enjoy reading it.

There are three major items. The very thorough survey of our 2018-19 concert season gives an idea of the range and variety of our programmes, which cover both standard and more 'out of the way' repertoire. Our final concert of the season included music by Gustav Holst, and this composer's brief, perhaps little-known, association with UCL is investigated in an article which illustrates how difficult it can sometimes be to get the facts straight! The latest in the 'Meet the Committee' series of interviews features Gillian Hogg, a recent recruit to the committee but a long-standing member of the Club who has taken part in our concerts as a choral singer and recorder player (and more than once provided invaluable advice on Russian pronunciation). A note about the forthcoming, and typically enterprising, UCOpera production completes the issue.

The Newsletter has now moved to yearly rather than twice-yearly production, which gives everyone more time to write articles! It's not too early, however, to be thinking about offering a contribution for our fourteenth issue, especially if you have not written for the Newsletter before. Concert and book reviews, letters to the editors and other short items, as well as full-length articles (c.3000 words) are all welcome. It's a good idea to let us know what you have in mind before you actually start writing. Feel free to contact any of the editors with your suggestions; we are: Dace Ruklisa (dd.r:t@btinternet.com), Jill House (j.house@ucl.ac.uk) and myself (rabeemus@gmail.com).

My thanks, as ever, to Dace and Jill for their work in preparing this issue.

*Roger Beeson, Chair, UCL CMC*

## Intimacy in trios, songs, films and jazz: a view on the experiments of the sixty-seventh season

The annual banquet of chamber music at UCL has not lacked in variety of tastes, dishes and even flowers to adorn it. The prevailing atmosphere of the fifteen concerts of the sixty-seventh season has been that of intimacy. The programmes have shown how different its sources can be, from piano trios to solo songs, from twentieth-century explorations of musical boundaries to twenty-first-century premieres, with quite a few Baroque eccentricities thrown in the middle. A strong core of classical chamber music repertoire has been juxtaposed with excursions into film and jazz, while almost every concert has included something less known and rarely played. Let us dwell on this feast for a while.

This season's chamber music repertoire involved a lot of introspection and sometimes also quirkiness and unpredictability. The major focus was on small ensembles and solo songs accompanied by a single instrument. Thus, four songs on Housman poems for voice and violin by Ralph Vaughan Williams revealed less typical facets of the composer's writing style. The first song, 'We'll to the woods no more', seemed wistful, with the violin part freely wandering and imitating the voice. Both musicians conjured an emotionally tense culmination towards the end. The singer exhibited excellent control of her voice, especially considering the broad vocal range of this short song and leaps across large intervals. 'Along the field' introduced the theme of death (prominent in this cycle) and relayed it in a slightly ironical vein, conveying the joys of life in the phrase 'it was a lover and his lass' and then quickly jumping to the inevitable outcome. Then 'The half-moon westers low' traversed several tonalities and sounded sparse and bleak regardless of the rich violin texture involving chords. At a November concert it was possible to appreciate the scope of Fauré compositions for solo piano, piano duet and voice and piano. 'Automne', Op.18 No.3 was the first in a sequence of Fauré songs. Initially the voice sounded as if at a distance. The singing gradually gained intensity and captured listeners' attention with nuanced phrasing. The lugubrious atmosphere of the songs was momentarily dissipated by the brighter sections of 'Spleen', Op.51 No.3 and 'Prison', Op.83 No.1. The piano parts of these pieces were notable – diverse textures and harmonies substantially contributed to the interpretations of the poems. Changes in rhythms were clearly emphasised by the piano, especially within the jumpy imitations of 'Automne'.

This season has witnessed several performances of piano trios in their entirety. In the autumn term Beethoven's Trio in B flat major, Op.11, was played on clarinet, cello and piano. In the first movement the timbres of clarinet and cello were well aligned. The cellist played almost without vibrato and added light and evasive flourishes to the texture. The piano came to the forefront with elegantly rendered fast passages. The second movement began with a cello melody that recalled an

ancient song – it was played without additional embellishments. Something naive





on cello and piano. It began in moderate and sustained tempo, which allowed full enjoyment of evenly and lightly played trills and decorations by the piano. Throughout this performance the left-hand part of the piano was executed in a sensitive way that did not overshadow other layers, but rather provided a punctuated grounding for different melodies. The very long notes of the cello sounded surprisingly interesting and even came to the foreground due to timbral nuances with which they were imbued. The second movement introduced a sprightly interplay between both instruments with frequent imitations of each other's themes. After this experience the Andante movement created a nearly hypnotic effect, especially by the slowly evolving, despondent and chillingly regular piano part; the cello assumed a leading role when emphasising transitions from minor to major and then back again. At a concert called 'Sing & Play' vivid impressions were cre-

section had a distinct texture and the piano accompaniment was always kept uncluttered, which allowed audience to appreciate diverse harmonic tints and the atonal melodic lines. In the end a subdued theme was played by the viola before descending into silence. This composition was preceded by *2 Wóafs* for solo piano by Henry Cowell – these miniatures were played with great expressiveness and also precision with respect to syncopations and pauses. This concert also included three Tango Etudes for solo violin by Astor Piazzolla. In the Etude No.3 the vi-

ble playing will be continued in May with an ensembles' programme. A themed concert about chivalry will include compositions related to Don Quixote among others. There is plenty of space for making musical discoveries and many signs of inventiveness and diversity in the forthcoming programmes.

*Dace Ruklisa*

## UCOpera presents Haydn's last opera

Founded in 1951, UCOpera is a student-led opera company based at UCL. It is known for staging a different opera every spring and for frequently bringing to attention less familiar works. This year Haydn's last opera, *L'anima del filosofo* or *Orfeo ed Euridice*, will be presented. It was composed in London, but was never fully performed during the composer's lifetime. The piece retells the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, a story of love, death and the power of music. This year's production will involve professional soloists and students and staff of UCL who take smaller roles and participate in the chorus and orchestra. The opera will be conducted by Charles Peebles, who is already known to UCL audiences from previous UCOpera productions. It is directed by Jack Furness and Crystal (Qiuyan) Da is preparing its design. Performances will take place in Bloomsbury Theatre on the evenings of 23rd, 25th, 27th and 28th March. Tickets can be bought online or in the theatre box office.

## Meet the committee – Gillian Hogg

Roger Beeson: *Gillian, when did you first become aware of the Chamber Music Club and what prompted you to join?*

Gillian Hogg: I joined UCL via SSEES (School of Slavonic and East European Studies) shortly after it merged so it felt a bit semi-detached and I didn't fully explore UCL life for a while. But I think I had vaguely heard of it before the time I was on a secondment and somehow found out that the 2009 Christmas concert would include part of Handel's *Messiah*. They were inviting singers to join, and it seemed I could fit in the proposed rehearsals, and it seemed like a good opportunity as I hadn't been able to join a choir for many years. Singing in the Christmas concerts has been the major aspect of my participation and in some years the 'Christmas choir' also did a summer concert together, or there were other



an early age. My grandmother played the piano, though I don't remember trying it out that much, before a friend of my mother passed on a second-hand piano to us when I was around seven. I managed to pick out a theme song and Christmas carol and it encouraged mum to get me lessons. My dad, meanwhile, had an old military clarinet stashed in a wardrobe which I eventually got a few notes out of. At some point I started with the treble recorder which was somewhat easier, and with my music training I sort of taught myself. I also got a more modern clarinet and based on the recorder experience more or less taught myself for a few years. Also in primary school, the music teacher was an amazing enthusiast, and, because kids are often made to learn their music by heart, I still remember *The Goliath Jazz* which we actually recorded onto vinyl.

I enjoyed playing but had virtually no discipline in my practice, scraped my way through the grades and even Music A-level, but I was always a nervous solo performer (lucky for the audience, as I'm sure my lack of practice meant the nerves were entirely justified!). And the secondary school was quite small with one orchestra and no vacancy for mediocre clarinetists, unlike the primary school wind band. So I tended to stick to choirs as well as piano.

RB: *You've been involved in quite a number of our concerts over the years. Are there any particular CMC events that you have especially enjoyed taking part in?*

GH: The Christmas concerts have covered a lot of ground and offered some challenges.

RB: *And any concerts you've attended as an audience member that stand out?*

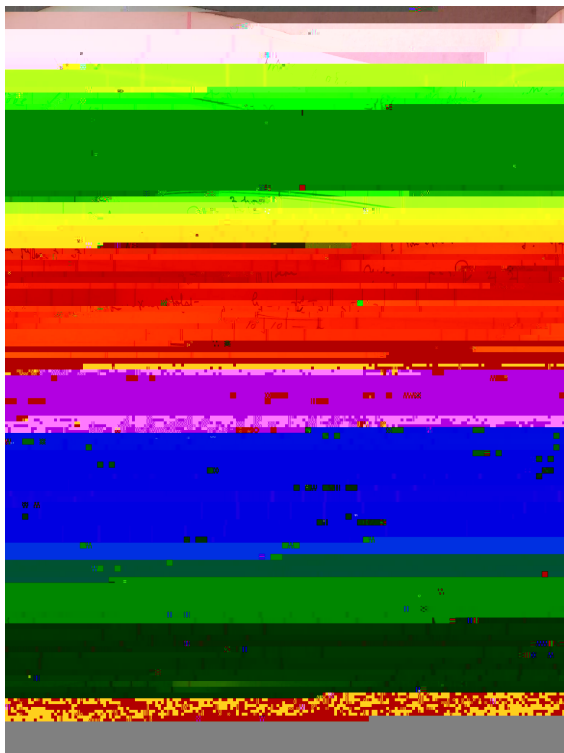
GH: The great thing about Chamber Music Club concerts in general is often that the items are short and you get to see a variety, so it seems invidious to mention them; but I did enjoy hearing my former SSEES colleague Barbara Wylie playing Bartók, in what may not strictly have been a CMC concert, but I believe Rupert Bawden also took part.

The other thing is the ones I did not hear or participate in and regret – such





late Gustav Holst, coming to me years ago for “Indian scales”:



All photos courtesy of UCL Special Collections.

he was an economic historian, and a translator of the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. He taught at UCL between 1898 and 1904, holding the post of Lecturer in Ancient Indian History.

It appears that Holst's Sanskrit studies did indeed begin in about 1898/99 with Dr Bode. Since she was abroad at various times and he was working as an orchestral trombonist, the extent and regularity of his studies must have been limited. He was also acquainted with Dutta, corresponding with him in 1901 about the libretto of a projected opera (which became *Sita*). This provides at least an indirect link with UCL, and Holst may indeed have heard Dutta lecture there. His interest in Sanskrit may have been renewed around 1907/08 in connection with the composition of *Savitri* and the solo and choral *Rig Veda* settings. According to Raymond Head he purchased Edward D. Perry's *A Sanskrit Primer* in July 1908, and seems to have worked his way through the first nineteen lessons. We can perhaps speculate that he then sought to refresh and further his Sanskrit studies formally. Did Mabel Bode (who had become, and remained for the rest of her life, a family friend) encourage him to enrol at UCL, or did he perhaps decide that this was the obvious thing to do? As we have seen, he joined the College in January 1909. If we assume that Mabel Bode's employment at UCL began in the autumn term of 1909, then Holst would initially have been taught by Professor L.D. Barnett. Thereafter he studied with Dr Bode: the Professors' Fees Book for 1909-10 records Holst's name and fees, with payment made to her by the College.

As an aside, we may note that Holst registered at UCL as Gustav Theodore von Holst. His mother was English, but his father was of predominantly German ancestry (with some Swedish and Latvian). For more than half his career he was known as Gustav von Holst, his works were published under that name, reviews and the like referred to 'Mr von Holst', he signed letters GVH, and Vaughan Williams wrote to him affectionately as 'Dear Von'. It was not until September 1918 that he formally dropped the 'von': he was part of an educational mission sent by the YMCA to British troops in the eastern Mediterranean, and he felt (or was advised) that a German-sounding name would not go down too well with the soldiers. (In fact the adjustment of his name came, comparatively speaking, rather late. At the outset of the First World War Russia's capital St Petersburg became Petrograd; and in July 1917 the British royal household was re-named the

Georgian; and the Italian doctored the name of the



