

ENSEMBLE 360

Premieres on Tuesday 11 May, 3.00pm
Filmed at Cast, Doncaster

ADRIAN WILSON oboe
NAOMI ATHERTON horn
TIM HORTON piano

BRITTEN Prologue
from *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*
POULENC Oboe Sonata
BRITTEN Temporal Variations
POULENC *Élégie* for Horn & Piano

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–1976)

Prologue for solo horn

from *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*

Benjamin Britten first met Dennis Brain in 1942 when Brain asked Britten to write something with a solo horn part. The result was one of the composer's finest works before *Peter Grimes*: the *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* composed in March–April 1943, and first performed by Peter Pears, Dennis Brain and a string orchestra conducted by Walter Goehr at the Wigmore Hall on 15 October 1943. The *Serenade* begins and ends with the same music for unaccompanied horn. Britten directs this to be 'played on natural harmonics', a magical effect that means some of the notes have slightly peculiar intonation – the result of physics and the harmonic series and not (as one early critic suggested) because Brain played 'out of tune'. In the *Serenade*, this short horn movement serves as a frame for the whole piece, but it also stands well on its own.

FRANCIS POULENC (1899–1963)

Oboe Sonata

Élégie. Paisiblement sans presser
Scherzo. Très animé
Déploration. Très calme

Poulenc described the elements of the Oboe Sonata – his last major work – as follows: 'The first movement is elegiac, the second scherzando, and the last a sort of liturgical chant.' The form of the Sonata is slow–fast–slow with its most original feature being the finale, a deeply-felt 'Déploration'. This eloquent tribute was dedicated to the memory of Serge

Prokofiev, but it was first performed at the Strasbourg Festival on 8 June 1963 by Pierre Pierlot and Jacques Février as a memorial to Poulenc himself, who had died earlier in the year.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Temporal Variations

Composed in 1936, Britten's *Temporal Variations* are summarised by the English musicologist Arnold Whittall as 'brilliant and impassioned', as well as revealing 'a very personal delight in economy, and ... that power to draw vividly characterised structures from simple basic material'. Curiously, they were not published until after Britten's death, but that's no reflection on their quality. They received enthusiastic reviews after the premiere at the Wigmore Hall on 15 December 1936, then called 'Temporal Suite' and played by oboist Natalie Caine with Adolph Hallis, piano. The theme has been described by the writer Eric Roseberry, a close friend of Britten's, as 'lean and hungry' with quite a free structure, and what follows are eight variations (called *Oration*, *March*, *Exercises*, *Communion*, *Chorale*, *Waltz*, *Polka* and *Resolution*) that treat the tune to some surprising twists and turns: everything from spiky humour to menace, from high spirits to profound seriousness. Roseberry also points out an intriguing instance of self-borrowing from the *Temporal Variations*: when Britten wrote the 'Marcia' of his Cello Sonata in 1961, it was the *March* from these variations that provided the source.

FRANCIS POULENC

Élégie for horn and piano

Poulenc composed his *Élégie* as a memorial to the celebrated British horn player Dennis Brain, who was killed in a car crash on the A1 on 1 September 1957, while Poulenc was on a visit to Britain. The first public performance was a BBC broadcast by the horn player Neill Sanders with Poulenc himself at the piano, on 1 September 1958, the anniversary of Brain's death. Sanders later recalled Poulenc's playing of the piano part: 'In the duplets you realise what he is doing is getting Dennis's heartbeat going through it. He does it very well ... You suddenly feel the pulse of a body in it.' As for playing the solo horn part, it was something Sanders found emotionally taxing – understandably: 'It was a pretty grim thing for me to do because Dennis's death didn't seem long ago'. From a musical point of view, the *Élégie* opens with a 12-note row, boldly announced by the unaccompanied horn, which is then brutally cut off by Stravinsky-like piano chords over which the horn introduces the agitated main theme. This powerful work is characteristic of the serious style of Poulenc's later music and a heartfelt tribute to a great artist.

All notes © Nigel Simeone 2021

ENSEMBLE 360

Ensemble 360 has gained an enviable reputation across the UK not only for the quality and integrity of its playing, but also for its ability to communicate the music to a range of different audiences. Formed in 2005, 11 musicians of international standing came together to take up residency in Sheffield with Music in the Round, establishing a versatile group of five string players, five wind players and a pianist. The musicians believe that concerts should be informal, friendly and relaxed occasions, and perform 'in the round' wherever possible. Critical acclaim has greeted all the group's CDs to date: Mozart and Spohr (ASV Gold), Beethoven and Poulenc (Nimbus Alliance).

MUSIC IN THE ROUND

Music in the Round is the leading national promoter of chamber music. For over 35 years we have been bringing people and music closer together through our friendly and informative style of 'in the round' performances, touring to numerous venues around the country as well as presenting two concert series and the Sheffield Chamber Music Festival each year at our home venue, the Crucible Studio. Our concerts are characterised by passion, excellence and proximity, and even in these challenging times of a global pandemic we have been striving to connect people through music by presenting socially-distanced live concerts and creating films featuring our musicians to enjoy online.

**THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING SHEFFIELD
CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL**

The Sheffield Chamber Music Festival is the highlight of the year for all of us, so although it's online again, we have put everything into creating a digital event that everyone can come together to enjoy, across Sheffield, South Yorkshire, the UK, and even the world!

Your generosity in the last year has made it possible for us to continue with our aim to bring people closer to music. It is thanks to you, our Friends, supporters and audiences, that we are able to bring you such a full Festival programme this May.

We are not charging for any of the events, but we are relying on your generosity to keep us going. For over a year now, musicians have been unable to work properly and earn a decent living. After facing such a challenging time for so long they need us more than ever. Any support that you give us makes a difference to them. **Please donate as you feel: every single gift makes a difference.**

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