

barbican

Classical Music
Concert programme

Anthony McGill
Milton Court
Artist-in-Residence

23 & 26 Apr
Milton Court Concert Hall



Important information



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Anthony McGill and Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Milton Court Artist-in-Residence

Tue 23 Apr 7.30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

Anthony McGill clarinet

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Elena Urioste violin

Benjamin Baker violin

Juan-Miguel Hernandez viola

Laura van der Heijden cello

Tom Poster piano

Johannes Brahms Clarinet Quintet

1 Allegro

2 Adagio

3 Andantino

4 Con moto

Interval 20 minutes

Olivier Messiaen *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*

1 Liturgie de cristal

2 Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps

3 Abîme des oiseaux

4 Intermède

5 Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus

6 Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes

7 Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce
la fin du temps

8 Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus

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Programme produced by Harriet Smith

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Trailblazing clarinettist Anthony McGill continues his residency at Milton Court in the company of the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective where the mellifluousness of late Brahms rubs shoulders with Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, a powerful statement of hope.

When Johannes Brahms reached the final double barline on his Second String Quintet in 1890, he believed himself ready to lay down his pen for good. Looking forward to a peaceful retirement, the 57-year-old composer informed his publisher Simrock that it was 'high time to stop'. Yet his plan was soon thwarted, for the best of reasons. The next spring Brahms visited Meiningen to hear its famous court orchestra, and one of the musicians he heard captured his imagination – sparking a new outpouring of creativity.

The player in question was Richard Mühlfeld, principal clarinettist of the band; he had been performing Weber's Clarinet Concerto and Mozart's Clarinet Quintet. Brahms believed him to be the finest woodwind player he'd ever heard, dubbing him 'the nightingale of the orchestra'. The pair become friends and Brahms picked up his pen again to write four pieces for Mühlfeld: the Clarinet Trio, Clarinet Quintet and two clarinet sonatas. Retirement's loss was our gain. The Clarinet Quintet is a work of remarkable beauty and sophistication and became one of his most beloved masterpieces.

The Quintet opens with a melancholic string phrase, turning and falling like an autumn leaf, heralding the arrival of the clarinet which breathes warmth into the music. At first, we could be in either D major or B minor – it's only after a few bars that the piece's home key of B minor is confirmed. These contrasting moods of melancholy and hope intertwine for the whole Allegro, an expansive movement that sets out the piece's symphonic ambition.

The Adagio is one of Brahms's loveliest creations, the gentle murmur of strings and singing clarinet line surely a nod to Mozart's sublime slow movement in his Clarinet Quintet. Brahms particularly loved the vocal quality of the instrument – another of his nicknames for Mühlfield was 'prima donna' – and he makes the most of that here in a movement full of wordless song. Its central *Più lento* section builds to a heightened emotional intensity, with tremolo strings and rhapsodic clarinet evoking his love of Hungarian folk music, before the serenity returns.

A flowing Andantino gets the third movement underway, but the music soon slips into a deft, dancing scherzo, reminiscent perhaps of Mendelssohn. The finale is a theme and set of five variations – a compositional technique at which Brahms excelled – given one last outing here. The clarinet becomes a character of huge variety, showing off its colour and range, sometimes intertwining as an equal partner with the strings, sometimes echoing or decorating their material, sometimes standing out as a soloist. It ends with a valedictory coda of quiet resignation.

For clarinetist Henri Akoka, the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* was 'the only memory of the war that I wish to keep'. Olivier Messiaen's masterpiece has, in turn, kept Akoka's spirit alive in musical form. Akoka was one of the musicians for whom the piece, premiered in the Stalag VIII-A prisoner-of-war camp on 15 January 1941, was written. A graduate of the Paris Conservatoire, the Algerian-Jewish clarinetist became part of a military orchestra; he was captured by the Nazis along with Messiaen, who was serving as a hospital nurse. Even during the journey to the camp in Silesia, they struck up a friendship based on their shared love of music. Akoka tried out a solo Messiaen had already composed – 'Abîme des oiseaux' (Abyss

of the birds) – which later, despite Akoka's complaints about its difficulty, became the third of the quartet's eight movements.

Music became a salvation for Messiaen. When he arrived at the camp, he was stripped of all his clothes. 'But, naked as I was, I clung fiercely to a little bag of miniature scores that served as consolation when I suffered,' he recalled. 'An officer also gave me pencils, erasers and some music paper.' The composer set to work, writing a piece for the instruments he had available: clarinet, violin, piano and cello. The *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* was premiered in a cold, dimly lit barracks in front of a few hundred people (not the 5,000 the composer himself claimed), following a lecture in which Messiaen explained the religious inspiration underpinning the work. 'Never have I been listened to with such attention and understanding,' he said.

His piece is, so he wrote in the preface to the score, 'transcendental, spiritual, catholic', inspired by the Angel of Apocalypse who proclaimed, 'There shall be time no longer'. Each of the movement titles is drawn from the Book of Revelation. As well as Messiaen's lifelong Catholic faith, the music draws on his fascination with birdsong (we hear the birds at dawn in the 'Crystal Liturgy' movement, for instance) and his synaesthesia, whereby he associated colours with keys (in the 'Vocalise, for the angel who announces the end of Time' he writes 'soft cascades of blue-orange chords'). Throughout, Messiaen explores his ideas of rhythm existing out of time, with ostinatos, interruptions and irregular rhythms. Born from a period of great horror, it has stood the test of time as one of the masterpieces of the 20th century.

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Anthony McGill: Gran Partita with musicians from Guildhall School Milton Court Artist-in-Residence

Fri 26 Apr 7.30pm, Milton Court Concert Hall

Anthony McGill clarinet Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Elena Urioste, Benjamin Baker violins

Juan-Miguel Hernandez viola

Laura van der Heijden cello

Guildhall School musicians

Charis Lai, Daisy Lihoreau oboes

Lily Payne clarinet

Kosuke Shirai, Beftat Erro Diez basset clarinets

Patrick Kearney, Amelia Cody-Byfield bassoons

Jack Reilly, Cathryn Nuta, Henry Ward, Alice Warburton horns

Gabriel Madel Rodrigues double bass

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Clarinet Quintet (with Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective)

1 Allegro energico

2 Larghetto affettuoso

3 Scherzo: Allegro leggiero

4 Allegro agitato – Un poco più moderato – Vivace

Interval 20 minutes

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart *Gran Partita* (with Guildhall musicians)

1 Largo – Molto allegro

2 Menuetto – Trio I – Trio II

3 Adagio

4 Menuetto: Allegretto – Trio I – Trio II

5 Romanze: Adagio – Allegretto

6 Tema con variazioni: Andante

7 Finale: Allegro molto

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For the last concert in his residency Anthony McGill is joined once again by the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective together with up-and-coming musicians from the Guildhall School for a programme combining a neglected masterpiece by Coleridge-Taylor with Mozart's much-loved *Gran Partita*.

'You've done it, me boy!' That was Charles Villiers Stanford's reaction, so the story goes, on first hearing his pupil Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's new Clarinet Quintet. Coleridge-Taylor had risen to a challenge set by his esteemed teacher: to follow in the footsteps of Brahms's recently published Clarinet Quintet without drawing any influence from the older composer. Stanford might have been overstating it to say there's nothing Brahmsian about the piece, but it's true that where Brahms revels in autumnal beauty in his quintet, Coleridge-Taylor gives us all the refreshing energy of spring in his.

This is all the more remarkable when you think that Brahms's work was only four years old when Coleridge-Taylor – a student at the Royal College of Music – wrote his F sharp minor Clarinet Quintet in 1895; it marked the culmination of a period immersed in chamber music, during which he wrote a Piano Quintet, Nonet, Piano Trio and *Fantasiestücke* and a String Quartet (now lost). Even though he was still a student, this four-movement work is far from sounding like an exercise or work-in-progress: it's the fully fledged real deal. Just three years later, Coleridge-Taylor would complete *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, the piece that made him one of the most popular composers in Britain.

So impressed was he by the Clarinet Quintet that Stanford took it with him on a trip to Berlin, where he presented it to the violinist Joseph Joachim, one of Brahms's great

friends and muses. Joachim, it's reported, both played and enjoyed the piece. Thanks to the current renaissance of Coleridge-Taylor's music, the Clarinet Quintet now has a chance to find the wide audience it deserves.

It begins with an energetic *Allegro energico*, full of rhythmic momentum and vivid folkish tunes, alternating between bittersweet and cheerful moods. It's here that the influence not of Brahms, but of Dvořák, with whose music Coleridge-Taylor had fallen in love as a teenager, can be heard. Coleridge-Taylor's father was from Sierra Leone and his mother was from England; Dvořák's absorption of African-American folk music into his style sparked him to explore his own Anglo-African heritage in music.

The *Larghetto affettuoso* is suffused with tenderness, with the clarinet's melody taking flight over sweet-toned strings. In the *Allegro leggiero Scherzo* Coleridge-Taylor has fun playing rhythmic games, flicking between its two time signatures of 3/4 and 9/8, while the central Trio section heads back into mellow, lilting waters. The quintet ends with an energetic *Allegro agitato*, in which the spirit of Dvořák lingers, but the voice is entirely Coleridge-Taylor's own.

When Mozart's Serenade No 10 for winds in B flat major – known as the *Gran Partita* – was performed in Vienna in 1784, one listener wrote a rapturous account of the experience: 'At each instrument sat a master – oh, what a glorious effect it made – glorious and great, excellent and sublime!' In the film *Amadeus* (celebrating its 40th anniversary this year) the composer Anton Salieri went a step further, saying that when he heard the *Gran Partita* 'it seemed to me that I was hearing the voice of God.'

The *Gran Partita* numbers, undoubtedly, among Mozart's many masterpieces; it's in seven movements and is scored for 13

instruments – four horns, two oboes, two bassoons, two clarinets, two basset horns and a double bass (sometimes replaced by a contrabassoon). It was billed before that 1784 concert as a 'great wind piece of a very special kind'. In fact, it was probably written in 1781 or 1782, when Mozart wrote two other mature wind serenades. The *Gran Partita* was part of the fashion for 'Harmoniemusik' at the time – that is, music written for groups of between five and 15 players, featuring pairs of wind instruments, to be heard during dinners and as serenades. In 1781 Mozart wrote to his father Leopold that 'at eleven o'clock at night I was treated to a serenade ... these musicians surprised me... in the most pleasant fashion imaginable with the first chord in E flat'.

Mozart delights his listeners with a stately *Largo*, setting out the ambitious, symphonic scale of the *Gran Partita* and leading to cheerful *Allegro molto* which quotes from a now forgotten comic opera, *Le Maréchal Ferrant* (1761) by Francois-Andre Danican Philidor. A Menuetto with two Trio sections follows, the first showcasing clarinets and basset horns, while the second gives us a hint of a minor key. The sublime *Adagio* is the movement that so impressed Salieri, on film at least. Over a lilting syncopated accompaniment, oboe, clarinet and basset horn unfold solo lines of great beauty. A second Menuetto takes us back into lighter territory, with contrasting Trios, while the fifth movement is a serene *Romanze* with contrasting minor-key *Allegretto* section. From there, we're onto a substantial set of theme and variations, in which the clarinet takes a leading role setting out the main theme – Mozart had in mind the fine player Anton Stadler, for whom he wrote his Clarinet Concerto and Clarinet Quintet. A perky rondo finale brings the piece to a bubbling conclusion.

© Rebecca Franks

Anthony McGill

Clarinetist Anthony McGill enjoys a dynamic international solo and chamber music career and is Principal Clarinet of the New York Philharmonic – the first African-American principal player in the organisation's history. He is the recipient of the 2020 Avery Fisher Prize, one of classical music's most prestigious awards.

He appears as a soloist with top orchestras, including the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestras, the Metropolitan Opera and the Baltimore, Boston, Chicago and Detroit Symphony orchestras. He performed alongside Itzhak Perlman, Yo-Yo Ma and Gabriela Montero at the inauguration of President Barack Obama, premiering a piece by John Williams.

As a chamber musician he has collaborated with the Brentano, Daedalus, Guarneri, JACK, Miró, Pacifica, Shanghai, Takács and Tokyo quartets, and performs with leading artists, including Emanuel Ax, Inon Barnatan, Gloria Chien, Yefim Bronfman, Gil Shaham, Midori, Mitsuko Uchida and Lang Lang.

He serves on the faculty of the Juilliard School and is the Artistic Director for its Music Advancement Program. He holds the William R and Hyunah Yu Brody Distinguished Chair at the Curtis Institute of Music.

In 2020 Anthony McGill's #TakeTwoKnees campaign, protesting at the death of George Floyd and historic racial injustice, went viral. Earlier this year he partnered with Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative to organise a classical music industry convening at EJI's Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, in which leaders and artists in classical music examined America's history of racial inequality and how this legacy continues to impact their work. anthonymcgill.com

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective was founded in 2017 and is the brainchild of Tom Poster and Elena Urioste, who met through the BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists scheme. The ensemble's flexible roster features many of today's most inspirational musicians, both instrumentalists and singers, and its creative programming is marked by an ardent commitment to celebrating diversity of all forms and a desire to unearth

lesser-known gems of the repertoire.

In 2020 Kaleidoscope was appointed Associate Ensemble at Wigmore Hall, where the group makes multiple appearances each season. Kaleidoscope broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 and has recently been ensemble-in-residence at the Aldeburgh Festival, Kettle's Yard, Ischia Festival, Maryland's Chamber Music by the Sea and Cheltenham Festival.

Kaleidoscope has recorded a series of acclaimed albums for Chandos and has recently embarked on a three-disc series of the piano quartets of Brahms and his female contemporaries.

Kaleidoscope is passionate about inspiring the next generation of musicians, leading to it feature in Wigmore Hall's Learning Festival, directing courses for the Benedetti Foundation, and holding a visiting professorship at the Royal Academy of Music in 2022–23. Recent and forthcoming performance highlights include concerts in London and Dortmund with Hilary Hahn, a debut at the BBC Proms, and two extensive tours of the USA.

For more information, visit www.kaleidoscopecc.com, where you can also find links to the individual musicians' websites.

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A global leader in creative and professional practice, it promotes innovation, experiment and research, receiving Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework in both Student Experience and Student Outcomes. It is also one of the UK's leading providers of lifelong learning in the performing arts, offering inspiring training for children, young people, adult learners, and creative and business professionals.

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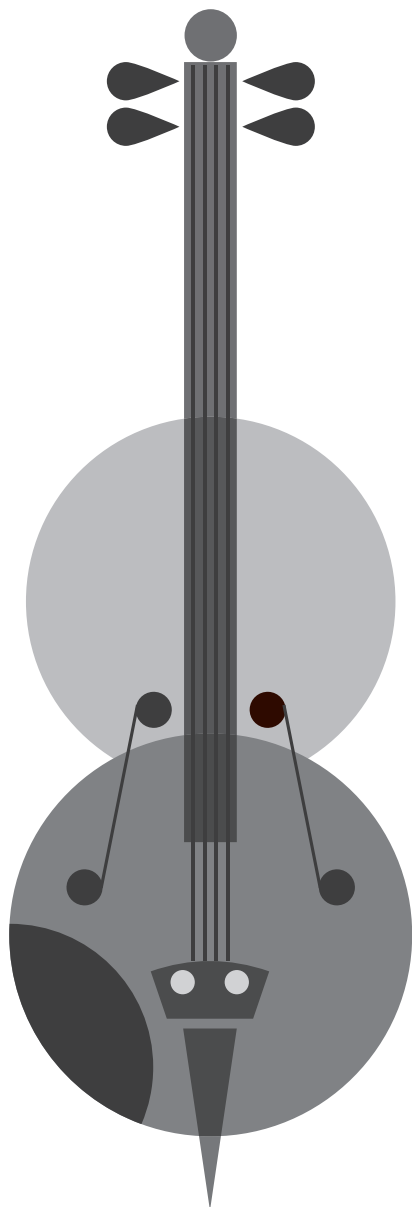
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