

SANIBEL MUSIC FESTIVAL PROGRAM NOTES

GOULD PIANO TRIO

**Lucy Gould, violin ~ Richard Lester, cello ~
Benjamin Frith, piano with**

ROBERT PLANE, clarinet

Saturday, March 21, 2019

~ PROGRAM ~

**Trio for Clarinet, Cello
And Piano in A minor, Op. 114**

Allegro

Adagio

Andantino grazioso

Allegro

**Johannes BRAHMS
(1833-1897)**

***Four Fables* for Clarinet, Violin,
Cello, and Piano**

Lento

Allegro

Lento

Lento — Andante — Allegro

**Huw WATKINS
(b. 1976)**

~ INTERMISSION ~

**Trio for Piano, Violin, and Cello
in F minor, Op. 65**

Allegro ma non troppo

Allegretto grazioso

Poco adagio

Allegro con brio

**Antonín DVOŘÁK
(1841-1904)**

Gould Piano Trio

The Gould Piano Trio, which was compared by the *Washington Post* to the great Beaux Arts Trio for its “musical fire” and “dedication to the genre,” has remained at the forefront of the international chamber music scene for a quarter of a century. Launched by their First Prize at the Melbourne Chamber Music Competition and subsequently selected as “Rising Stars” by Britain’s Young Concert Artists Trust Artists, the ensemble made a highly successful debut at New York’s Weill Recital Hall that was described by *Strad Magazine* as “Pure Gould.” The Trio’s many appearances at London’s Wigmore Hall have included the complete piano trios of Dvořák, Mendelssohn, and Schubert, plus a Beethoven cycle in 2017-2018 to celebrate the ensemble’s 25th anniversary appearing at that iconic venue. Commissioning and performing new works is an important part of the Gould Trio’s philosophy of remaining creative inspired.

Most recently, the Trio premiered *Four Fables* by Huw Watkins, one of today’s most popular British composers, who was featured at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center this past season. The Trio has made extensive tours of North America, the Far East, and New Zealand, and performed throughout Europe. The ensemble’s own Festival in Corbridge, Northumberland, attracts fans from as far away as Australia, who come each summer for a chamber music feast. The Gould Trio’s diverse discography includes the masterpieces of the repertory as well as many neglected gems, often rediscovered through artistic collaboration. Its cycles of Brahms and Dvořák (Champs Hill), Hummel (Naxos), and Beethoven (Somm) were recorded live at St. George’s, Bristol; those releases are complemented by single-composer discs of the late romantic British repertory with clarinetist Robert Plane.

Robert Plane

Robert Plane’s varied career has seen solo appearances in the Mozart Clarinet Concerto in Madrid with the City of London Sinfonia, in Beijing with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and in America with the Virginia Symphony. In 1992, Mr. Plane won the Overall Gold Medal at the Royal Overseas League Music Competition in London. He made his BBC Proms debut at the Royal Albert Hall in 2011 and recently performed Piers Hellawell’s *Agricolas* with the Ulster Orchestra and RTE Symphony Orchestra, as well

as music of Gerald Finzi with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra and of Charles Villiers Stanford with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Robert Plane is highly regarded for his solo recordings for Naxos. His account of Finzi's Clarinet Concerto won *Classic CD Magazine's* Best Concerto Recording Award and was selected as BBC Radio 3's recommended version in "Building a Library," his recording of Arnold Bax's Sonatas was shortlisted for a Gramophone Award, and his CD of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* with the Gould Trio was praised by *BBC Music Magazine* as the "best modern account" of that monumental work. Robert Plane's latest disc, *Contrasts*, was described by *The Guardian* as "a little gem."

Johannes BRAHMS — Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano in A minor, Op. 114 (1891)

As an unrepentant, life-long bachelor (he once vowed that he would "never undertake either a marriage or an opera"), Johannes Brahms depended heavily on his circle of friends for support, encouragement, and advice. By word and example, Robert Schumann set him on the path of serious composition as a young man; Schumann's widow, Clara, was Brahms' chief critic and confidante throughout his life. The violinist Joseph Joachim was an indefatigable champion of Brahms' chamber music and provided him with expert technical information during the composition of the Violin Concerto. Hans von Bülow, a musician of gargantuan talent celebrated as both pianist and conductor, played Brahms' music widely and made it a mainstay in the repertory of the superb court orchestra at Meiningen during his tenure there as music director from 1880 to 1885. Soon after arriving in Meiningen, Bülow invited Brahms to be received by the music-loving Duke Georg and his consort, Baroness von Heldburg, and Brahms was provided with a fine apartment and encouraged to visit the court whenever he wished. (The only obligation upon the comfort-loving composer was to don the much-despised full dress for dinner.) Brahms returned frequently and happily to Meiningen to hear his works played by the orchestra and to take part in chamber ensembles. At a concert in March 1891, he heard a performance of Weber's F minor Clarinet Concerto by the orchestra's principal player of that instrument, Richard Mühlfeld, and was overwhelmed. "It is impossible to play the clarinet better than Herr Mühlfeld does here," he wrote to Clara. "He is absolutely the best I know." So fluid and sweet was Mühlfeld's playing that Brahms dubbed him "Fräulein Nightingale," and flatly proclaimed him to be the best wind instrument

player he had ever heard. Indeed, so strong was the impact of the experience that Brahms was shaken out of a year-long creative lethargy, and the Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano (Op. 114) and Quintet for Clarinet and Strings (Op. 115) were composed for Mühlfeld without difficulty between May and July 1891 at the Austrian resort town of Bad Ischl, near Salzburg. Three years later, Brahms was inspired again to write for Mühlfeld, and produced the two Sonatas for Clarinet and Piano (Op. 120). Both the Trio and the Quintet were first heard at a private recital at Meiningen on November 24, 1891 presented by Brahms (as pianist), Mühlfeld, cellist Robert Hausmann, and the other members of the Joachim Quartet. The same forces gave the public premieres of both works in Berlin on December 12th.

Both the Trio and the Quintet that Brahms devised for Mühlfeld are autumnal in mood, tinged throughout with the bittersweet nostalgia that marked the music of the composer's full maturity, a quality to which the darkly limpid sonority of the clarinet is perfectly suited. The Trio's opening movement, a seamlessly woven sonata form that treats the two melody instruments as twin voices, begins with a somber main theme that arches through the cello's tenor register. The ensemble's discussion of this motive leads to a climax, from which emerges the second theme, a lyrical cello melody that, reversing the shape of the main theme, descends then rises. The compact development section, based on the main subject, is draped with ribbons of scales passed among the participants. The themes are somewhat altered upon their returns in the recapitulation, and the movement ends with a whispered reminiscence of the scales from the development. The *Adagio* is a tender, introspective duet with piano accompaniment that makes superb use of the burnished hues of clarinet and cello. The third movement, one of Brahms' final tributes to the lilting dance music of his adopted Viennese home, takes a graceful, languid, waltz-like strain as its principal theme, and creates contrast with a rustic episode in the manner of the countryside *Ländler*. The main theme of the sonata-form finale, initiated by the cello, comprises bold phrases of leaping intervals followed by a tight, scale-step motive; the contrasting subsidiary subject is more flowing. The development section is dominated by the impetuous main theme. The Clarinet Trio, Brahms' penultimate piece of chamber music, concludes with the recapitulation of the finale's themes and a brilliant coda grown from the principal subject.

**Huw WATKINS — *Four Fables for Clarinet, Violin, Cello,
and Piano* (2018)**

Composer and pianist Huw Watkins, born July 13, 1976 in Pontypool, Wales, twenty miles north of Cardiff, began his formal music studies at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester and continued his professional education at King's College, Cambridge, where he studied composition with Robin Holloway and Alexander Goehr, and at the Royal College of Music in London as a student of Julian Anderson; he was awarded the Constant and Kit Lambert Junior Fellowship at the RCM. Huw Watkins is now a faculty member and Honorary Research Fellow at London's Royal Academy of Music. In 2016, he received the Elise L. Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and has held residencies with the International Music Seminar Prussia Cove (Cornwall, UK), BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Spannungen Chamber Music Festival (Heimbach, Germany) and Music Theatre Wales, which commissioned his chamber operas *Crime Fiction* and *In the Locked Room*, both with librettos by David Harsent. In addition to his stage works, Watkins has also written a half-dozen concertos (including one for his brother, cellist Paul Watkins), several orchestral compositions, three string quartets, many pieces for various chamber ensembles, and numerous songs; his *Five Larkin Songs* won the 2011 British Composer Award for Vocal Music from the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers, and Authors. Huw Watkins is also widely known as a solo and chamber pianist in new music on concerts, broadcasts, and recordings on the EMI Classics, Wergo, Chandos, Signum, Nimbus, NMC, and USK labels.

Huw Watkins composed *Four Fables* for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, and Piano in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Corbridge Chamber Music Festival in northeast England, which shared the commission with the Swansea International Festival, Three Choirs Festival, and Wigmore Hall; the work was premiered on July 31, 2018 at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford by clarinetist Robert Plane and the Gould Piano Trio, co-directors of the Corbridge Festival. "*Four Fables* comprises four movements," wrote Watkins, "with slower *Lento* movements encircling a faster *Allegro* second movement. The unusual instrumental combination of clarinet, violin, cello, and piano was made famous by Olivier Messiaen with his *Quartet for the End of Time*, yet it was in fact the fanciful character of Robert Schumann's *Märchenerzählungen* ('*Fairy Tale Narrations*') for clarinet, viola, and piano that most inspired the piece. Schumann was interested in the 'picturesque and the fanciful' but left no link to specific fairy tales. This was a similar starting point for me when writing these four varied fables."

Antonín DVOŘÁK — Trio for Piano, Violin, and Cello F minor, Op. 65 (1883)

Success for Antonín Dvořák was a two-edged sword. In 1874, when he was struggling to make a living as organist at St. Adalbert's Church in Prague, he submitted some of his compositions to a committee in Vienna granting awards to promising musicians in the Habsburg provinces. Those pieces came to the attention of Johannes Brahms, who encouraged Dvořák in his work and urged the panel to grant the young Bohemian composer the highest possible stipend. Three years later, after Brahms had seen that Dvořák's award was renewed, he instructed his publisher, Fritz Simrock in Berlin, that he was to accept Dvořák as a new client. Dvořák was thrilled with the opportunities his Viennese connections opened for him, and he paid Brahms great homage in word and tone for the rest of his life. Brahms, however, was indissolubly linked with the spirit and letter of German music, and Dvořák soon came to be torn between the desire on one hand to emulate his Viennese patron and on the other to support the political and social aspirations of his fellow Czechs. That dichotomy resulted in a crisis of philosophy for Dvořák by 1882, when Brahms was urging him to settle in Vienna and opera houses in that city and Dresden were offering lucrative contracts for any work he would write to a German-language libretto, a certain avenue to the international performance of his stage music. Dvořák was still painfully undecided between Vienna and Prague, between his adopted

German symphonism and his native Czech heritage, when his mother died on December 14, 1882. The grief he suffered over her loss and the emotional distress brought about by uncertainty over his future artistic path threw him into a difficult period of dark moods and troubled thoughts. Even the birth of a son (Antonín) on March 7, 1883 and news that his *Stabat Mater* had been enthusiastically received at its English premiere in London a few days later did little to relieve his anxiety or ease his decision. After a brief hiatus in his creative work, he poured his feelings into some of his most powerful and deeply felt works during the following months. The first of those compositions was the superb Piano Trio in F minor, begun on February 4, 1883, only six weeks after Anna Dvořák's death, and completed on March 31st. The *Scherzo Capriccioso* for Orchestra (Op. 66) followed immediately after the Trio, and the *Hussite Overture* (Op. 67), inspired by the Hussite Rebellion, the 15th-century political, social, and religious movement led by

Jan Hus that sought sectarian freedom and Bohemian independence, gave testimony that he had resolved his artistic conflict in favor of his Czech nationalism. The great D minor Symphony (No. 7, Op. 70) appeared a year later.

The F minor Trio, the first work of that period of intense emotion and heated creativity, received the brunt of Dvořák's turbulent feelings. It is perhaps indicative of his troubled state of mind at the time that he omitted from the end of the manuscript the phrase *Bohu díky* ("Thanks to God"), which had invariably been appended to his earlier pieces. "There is hardly another work in Dvořák's output so sorrowful, somber, and poignant," wrote Hans-Hubert Schönzeler. "It must rank among the greatest of his chamber music compositions." Dvořák took special care with this Trio, allowing nearly two months for its composition rather than the customary two or three weeks he usually devoted to a chamber work, and then revising it so thoroughly after its premiere on October 27, 1883 in Mladá Boleslav (thirty miles northeast of Prague) that he had to write out a complete new score.

Though the opening movement is contained within traditional sonata form, its wrought-up, willful mood threatens, observed Paul Stefan, "to burst the bounds and transcend the content of chamber music, passionately striving to merge into the symphonic." The dotted-rhythm main theme begins quietly in the strings, though this is a quiet not of calm but of suppression. The entry of the piano unleashes the inherent dynamism of the principal theme, but emotional control is again restored with the transition, which leads to the cello's presentation of the second theme, a lovely melody whose nominal major mode is continually troubled by plaintive chromatic alterations. The development section, which ranges in mood from sullen to defiant, is impelled by an almost Beethovenian sense of drama. The recapitulation serves not only to recall the exposition's themes but also to thrust their emotional intensity to a higher plane by means of richer figurations, tighter interplay among the instrumental lines and expansion through motivic development.

The second movement is a scherzo in the form of a Bohemian folk dance. The strings begin the dance with a bouncing motive, suggestive of a bagpipe-drone, upon which the piano presents the short-breathed, rather melancholy tune whose varied permutations occupy the first section of the movement. A full stop marks the gateway to the central trio, whose initial bright mood is clouded by the music's unsettled rhythms and

apprehensive flattened scale degrees. The opening section is repeated exactly to round out the movement's structure. The *Adagio* is one of Dvořák's most deeply felt creations, beautiful of line, rich of sonority, and sincere in expression. Though the movement is in a key that could offer some sunny solace for the troubled music which surrounds it, the tiny flickers of chromaticism — the lowering of a tone by a half-step to blunt its happiness, like a cloud passing across the sun or the thought of a departed loved one at a moment of joy

— further concentrate rather than dispel the Trio's abiding disquiet. The finale is modeled on the *furiant*, a traditional Czech dance whose fiery character is indicated by its name. The movement, built as a large sonata-rondo form anchored around the recurrences of its principal theme, draws strength from the struggles of the preceding music to achieve a life-affirming close with the turn to the heroic major tonality in its final pages.

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