

Gould Piano Trio – review

St George's, Bristol

Rian Evans

Thursday 24 May 2012

The Gould Piano Trio's Beethoven series, celebrating their 20th anniversary year, reached its culmination with this concert of the composer's first and last works in the medium. The great arc from his Op 1 No 1 in E flat, to Op 97 in B flat, dedicated to Archduke Rudolph, actually spans less than 20 years. Prefaced by a single, even earlier, E flat movement with its own charm, the concert charted perfectly Beethoven's transition from the young lion and brilliant pupil of Haydn, to mature master. More remarkably still, the trauma of Beethoven's transition into deafness is sublimated in the very last Trio.

Part of the wonder in the Goulds' profoundly musical performance was the fluctuating balance they found between the natural intimacy of the trio and the massive scale of Beethoven's approach to structural form. The players' shared understanding found them moving easily between subtle understatement and emphatically resonant delivery of the composer's most dramatic articulations.

After pointing up the incipient genius in the first Trio, whose spirited finale so boldly flags the way forward, the last Trio, the "Archduke", was an even more masterly interpretation. The first movement was treated as an elegant Schubertian expanse, while the dark, shadowy aura of the Scherzo's chromatic trio, and the surging crescendo into its outburst of rich chords, were made to sound utterly logical.

Cantabile playing – beautiful singing tone – is fundamental to the Goulds' style, and this was most apparent in the slow movement, its variations unfolding gently and majestically. Hats off to violinist Lucy Gould, cellist Alice Neary and pianist Benjamin Frith, but the honour was threefold. This was compelling playing, with every note voiced to carry its true functional and emotional weight, as the live recording will surely confirm.

>> LONDON

The 2007–08 season came to an end in a blaze of fine chamber music performances. **TIM HOMFRAY** reports

Tippett Quartet: grace and charm



BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

SCHUBERT WAS A RECURRING THEME IN JULY. ON 3 JULY

the **Florestan Trio** performed two works of his at the Wigmore Hall, the Notturmo in E flat major and his B flat major Piano Trio. The former was alluring, by turns contemplative and dramatic. In the latter there was muscular playing, particularly from the strings in the opening movement, while pianist Susan Tomes played with a delicious coquettish lightness at times. There was a determination to this movement, within which the occasional lingering and indulgence in a phrase was all the more effective. Some exquisite playing followed, with a gentle give and take between violinist Anthony Marwood and cellist Richard Lester in the second movement and the Mendelssohnian approach to the Scherzo. They even found a childlike innocence in the finale, countering the obsessive overbearance of its recurrent theme.

In the second half they were joined by violinist Laura Samuel and violist Krzysztof Chorzelski for a performance of Fauré's First Piano Quintet. Here there was both narrative drive and sensuous enjoyment, with beautiful extended singing lines in the slow movement and a captivating simplicity to the finale.

The **Tippett Quartet** brought grace and charm to its Wigmore Hall concert on 6 July. The performance of Tippett's Second Quartet was noteworthy for its lightness of touch. The complex cross-rhythms of the opening movement were played with limpid clarity, and the third and fourth movements, while full of energy and drive, maintained a sense of space and airiness. The quartet was joined by soprano Grace Davidson for the UK premiere of David Braid's *Morning*, a setting of a Pablo Neruda poem characterised by long-drawn lines and shifting tonality, in which the performers created a sense of both movement and stasis. There was again a luminous quality in the performance of Beethoven's C sharp minor Quartet op.131, particularly in the tone and texture of the opening fugue, and the insouciance of the Andante theme. The players found many vivid characters in the work, from the grotesque to the muscular, but it was a good-natured performance overall.

On the blisteringly hot evening of 7 July violinist **Nicola Benedetti** and pianist Steven Osborne appeared in Plaisterer's Hall as part of the City of London Festival. It was a concert with many good things, but most apparent of all was the extraordinary degree of rapport and shared music-making between these two players. They opened with

a muscular performance of Debussy's Violin Sonata, combining the fractured elements of this multicoloured piece into a compelling whole. To Prokofiev's First Sonata they brought several varieties of bleakness, with increasing ferocity in the second movement and rich melodic playing both here and in the third movement, before a surge of emotional power was unleashed in the last. The understanding between the players was most evident in the more genial milieu of Brahms's Second Sonata. In an acoustic both rewarding and almost cruel in its clarity they produced a performance of lightness and warmth.

Schubert's other great piano trio, the one in E flat major, featured in the **Gould Piano Trio's** concert at the Wigmore Hall on 17 July. The players opened with Mozart's B flat major Trio K502, which received crisp playing, full of charm, with an easy humour in the second movement. It was followed by James MacMillan's *14 Little Pictures* from 1997, a set of miniatures run together into a work of often haunting eloquence, here from cellist Alice Neary in particular. Violinist Lucy Gould had moments of birdlike twittering, and indeed there were times when both string players sounded like a couple of mournful tenor seagulls. Their performance of the Schubert was monumental. The first movement built up to a coda of tremendous grandeur, and Neary was notable again in the second, with her playing beautifully simple at the opening. The second theme here was played with a captivating, slightly exaggerated lilt, and the climaxes had huge power and majesty.

The following night, the **Chilingirian Quartet** came to the Wigmore. It began with a jaunty performance of Haydn's D major Quartet op.50 no.6 'Frog', with leader Levon Chilingirian tackling his filigree passagework with relish. Peter Fribbins's Second Quartet 'After Cromer' followed. This is a conversational sort of work, four people talking sometimes in turn and sometimes all at once. It has beguiling moments, sounding faintly like late Fauré, interrupted by aggressive unison statements, and was given a colourful and convincing performance.

Beethoven's Quartet in E flat major op.127 received a performance attractive on the surface and emotionally complex beneath, marked by clarity of texture and ensemble. There was both a beguiling naivety and a richness in the playing, particularly in the first movement. The great drive of the third movement was offset by a kind of uncertainty. The last movement, however, seemed a little mannered in its changes of speed and overemphasis on leading parts.

Erwin Schulhoff wrote the first of his five string quartets in 1924. In the hands of the **Henschel Quartet**, performing at the Wigmore Hall on 23 July, it emerged as an engaging and ultimately unsettling work. The second movement has an edge of sardonic comedy in its lyrical, eccentric melodies, wonderfully characterised by violist Monica Henschel-Schwind and cellist Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj in particular. The last movement is grimmer fare, with insistent, oscillating minor thirds and sustained, discordant lines – beautifully controlled here – fading to nothing.

Violist **Kazuki Sawa** joined the quartet for the belated world premiere of Max Bruch's String Quintet in E flat major, which the players tackled splendidly, steadily building up passion in long lines over undulating textures in the slow movement and maintaining clarity in what could easily have become a textural fog. Leader Christoph Henschel scurried about brilliantly in the virtuosic writing of the finale. Their subsequent performance of Schubert's late G major Quartet was highly coloured and very powerful, but it had 'interpretation' written all over it and never really settled down. The first movement was virtually an operatic scena, but the finale was a blazing, white-knuckle ride. ■

GOULD PIANO TRIO

The Sage, Gateshead

Reviewed in The Northern Echo, 27 January 2005

THE Gould Piano Trio initiated the Music in the Round series in the intimate surroundings of The Sage Gateshead's Hall Two with an electrifying evening of contrasting works spanning three centuries.

The concert began with a poised opening to Mozart's Trio in C. There was a sense the trio were finding each other at first (possibly overawed by the sheer immediacy of the pin-sharp acoustics), but it didn't take long for that indefinable something to kick in.

Gelling with a fluency that did full justice to the work, they goaded each other on. The andante oozed pathos, with pianist Benjamin Frith completely immersed in the moment; his eyes clenched shut, brows knitted and with a pained expression written all over his face as he swayed from side to side. The allegro was sharply articulated.

Next up was James Macmillan's Fourteen Little Pictures, representing the Stations of the Cross. Stitched together to form a sweeping canvas, the composition conveys a gamut of emotions as it veers wildly from raging violence to sublime calm.

Frith's ferocious attacks on the piano vividly simulated a throbbing rumbling thunderstorm, while cellist Alice Neary and violinist Lucy Gould were perfectly matched with their brilliantly intertwined melodies.

The recital concluded on an inexorable thumping note, with the last strike sustained for what seemed an eternity.

The second half of the evening was devoted to Tchaikovsky's awe-inspiring piano trio, which grew organically with its shifting moods and colours gloriously painted in. A veritable musical feast.

Gavin Engelbrecht



CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

Honest emotion meets artistic insight

The Gould Piano Trio brings passion and nuance to works by Smetana and others.

By Chris Pasles
Times Staff Writer

March 7, 2003

With a deeply felt performance of Smetana's Piano Trio in G minor, the Gould Piano Trio closed a wonderful three-part program Wednesday in the Bing Theater at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Smetana composed the work upon the death of his 4-year-old daughter, Bedriska, from scarlet fever. It will not tolerate a moment of insincerity or exaggeration from the players. Violinist Lucy Gould, cellist Alice Neary and pianist Benjamin Frith met its emotional demands with the highest commitment and deepest artistic insight, seamlessly moving through its shifting, conflicting states of feeling while revealing their complexities and nuances.

To single out just one example: There's a moment in the first movement when a noble cello theme mounts into an impassioned, then almost hysterical ensemble climax. Shortly after, the movement breaks down and stops, only to start over again from the beginning, with a repeat of the violin's keening motive. The cycle of grief is endless. All this was detailed with the most natural sense of inevitability by the Gould musicians.

Similarly, they revealed the exposed, vulnerable heart of Brahms in the vernal simplicity of the third movement of his Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor.

Everywhere, they played with unanimity of impulse and aesthetic. In Beethoven's Piano Trio in E-flat, Opus 1, No. 1, which opened the program, they added impishness and urbane playfulness. Their range and variety made for a joyful evening.



Pure Gould

With clear textures and balanced ensemble, a recital in New York this April offered trio playing at its best. **Dennis Rooney** reports

The **Gould Piano Trio** put its best foot forward in a one-hour programme in the Walter Reade Theater (1 April). Benjamin Frith's lightly produced, highly articulate piano playing, the resonance nicely damped, gave the lie to those who think that a Steinway D model with the lid fully raised will automatically cover the strings. Frith's tonal discipline was complemented by cellist Martin Storey's, whose instrument was precisely tuned to match the keyboard instrument's lower register. In Haydn's Trio in C major HobXV:27 that meant the cello line spoke with clarity instead of a semi-coherent grumble. All the players made something special of both this work and Dvřák's 'Dumky' Trio, in which they had the courage to observe the composer's dynamic markings precisely but not pedantically. Violinist Lucy Gould shaped her phrases intelligently, with affecting tone; Storey produced some elegant portamentos and Frith's pianism was always energised yet firmly controlled.

Los Angeles Times

F12

MONDAY, MARCH 26, 2001

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Gould Piano Trio Makes a Spirited Debut in L.A.

Music Review

The Gould Piano Trio has been a steadily brightening star of the U.K. chamber music scene since its inception in 1987. Two years ago, the ensemble made its Carnegie Hall debut, and Friday it finally reached Los Angeles for its local debut at the Doheny Mansion, presented by the Da Camera Society.

This is a strong group, not immaculate but spirited and direct. Pianist Benjamin Frith joined violinist Lucy Gould and cellist Martin Storey just two years ago, but ensemble values are high here and expressive goals convincingly met.

Their account of Schubert's E-flat Trio was structurally well-lit and emotionally elegant, heartfelt without indulgence.

Their sound was big and bright, their balances assured, and they kept the iterations of the sprawling finale moving—indeed, the return of the haunted Andante march was almost too well-integrated for maximum dramatic impact.

There was not much really soft playing in the Schubert, but tautly hushed moments abounded in Ravel's Trio. This is music well-matched with the Pompeian Room in opulence and style, and the Gould Piano Trio delivered it with generous power and rich detail.

The group opened with the Haydn Trio in C, Hob. XV:21, an amiable, characteristically quirky piano showpiece brilliantly played by Frith, with casual contributions from the almost optional strings.

—JOHN HENKEN

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T H E D A C A M E R A S O C I E T Y

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25 November 2002

DeeAnne Hunstein
Hunstein Artist Services, Inc.
65 West 90th Street 13F
New York, NY 10024

Dear DeeAnne,

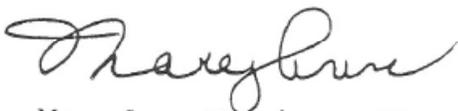
The Gould Piano Trio was absolutely wonderful!

Thanks so much for making it possible for our audience to experience their concert at the Doheny Mansion on November 15th. Although we unfortunately had no reviewer, everyone present was visibly moved and excited by their performance.

Please pass our warmest thanks on to each member of the ensemble. Their work is brilliant, elegant, and affecting. We are fans!

Thanks again.

Sincerely,



MaryAnn Bonino, Ph.D.
Founding/Artistic Director

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Presenter Reports

November 2005

GOULD PIANO TRIO

Hunstein Artist Services (02B)

The Frick Collection (New York, NY)/Same
(175 seats): Apr. 3, 05 (1 perf/174 attend)

Joyce Bodig, Concert Coordinator (212/547-
6875)

**C: 4 M:4 T:4 Out:- Att:4 Aud:-
Con:4**

Comments: Nicely balanced ensemble.
Communicated music well to audience. They
Provided a very satisfying musical experience.

**Was this presentation meant to challenge
your audience:** Somewhat

Were you satisfied with the attendance: Very
Much

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January 2003

Presenters' REPORTS

An Arts Presenters membership benefit since 1972

GOULD PIANO TRIO (Hunstein Artist Services) 02B

Mayville State U. (ND) Fine Arts Series (Mayville, ND)/MASU Auditorium
(Proscenium/400 seats): November 18, 2002 (1 perf/175 attendance)

Anthony Thein, Artistic Director (612/874-9238)

C:4 T:4 M:4 Out:- Atd:4 Au:4 Con:4

Comments: The trio was competing with several other community events, yet attendance was better than expected. The performers are of the highest caliber, and they performed a program that was challenging for the audience. The audience was thrilled by the performance. For many listeners this was a first-time experience - what a great way to start one's listening experiences!

Was this intended to challenge your audience? Somewhat

How satisfied were you with attendance? Very much

GOULD PIANO TRIO (Hunstein Artist Services) 02B

Reif Arts Council (Grand Rapids, MN)/Reif Center (Modified Thrust/642 seats):
November 19, 2002 (1 perf/300 attendance)

David Marty, Exec. Director (218/327-5780)

C:4 T:4 M:3 Out:4 Atd:4 Au:4 Con:4

Comments: We generally plan for an audience of 150-200 for our chamber music performances - having 300 is an unexpected surprise. The performance was sophisticated and extraordinary. The trio presented a follow-up workshop after the concert that was one of the best college-level workshops I've attended.

Was this intended to challenge your audience? Very much

How satisfied were you with attendance? Very much

THE GOULD PIANO TRIO (Hunstein Artist Services) 02B

Strathmore Hall Arts Center (North Bethesda, MD)/Strathmore Hall (Music
Room/110 seats): November 21, 2002 (1 perf/106 attendance)

Gabriel Purviance, Vice President of Programming (301/530-0540)

C:4 T:4 M:4 Out:3 Atd:4 Au:3 Con:4

Comments: The program was virtuosic and strenuous, and performed beautifully. Even after such a strenuous program, the Trio responded to the audience appreciation with an encore. The program was: Rachmaninov, "Trio Elegance No. 1;" Shostakovich, "Trio No. 2 Op.;" Schubert, "Trio in B Flat Op. 99."

Was this intended to challenge your audience? Somewhat

How satisfied were you with attendance? Very much

Also presented by:

DaCamera Society (Los Angeles, CA) November 15, 2002 (213/427-2953), Mary Ann Bonino

C:4 T:4 M:4 Out:4 Atd:4 Au:4 Con:4

Hudson Valley Music Club (Irvington, NY) November 25, 2002 (914/591-6851), Marjorie Hone

C:4 T:4 M:4 Out:- Atd:4 Au:4 Con:4

North Dakota Museum of Art (Grand Forks, ND) November 17, 2002 (612/874-9238), Anthony Thein

C:4 T:4 M:4 Out:- Atd:4 Au:3 Con:4



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