



In this issue:

[A nostalgic view on the 68th season: page 2](#)

[Meet the committee – Michele Chan: page 7](#)

[The year 2020 not just the Beethoven anniversary: page 9](#)

Welcome to our newsletter

A belated welcome to the fourteenth issue of the Chamber Music Club Newsletter. When our thirteenth issue came out, in February 2020, few people could have foreseen how drastically life would change within a few weeks, or for how long. Like other organisations the CMC had to cancel planned events; like others we have maintained an online presence. For myself, the sooner we can get back to 'live' activities the better; but meanwhile here is some reading matter for your (hopefully 'unlocked-down'!) summer.

Two articles in this issue look back, one with direct reference to the CMC, one for general music-historical interest. A survey of our 2019/20 concerts covers a wide range of music in what was a successful and eventful season before it came to a premature end in March. Meanwhile, for classical musicians with a penchant for anniversaries 2020 was pre-eminently the Beethoven year. Particular significance seems to be attached to anniversaries involving 50 years and multiples thereof, so Beethoven's 250th birthday was always going to loom large and it did so despite the pandemic. So what could be more appropriate than to have a look at some of 2020's *non*-Beethovenian anniversaries?

It's not all looking back, though. The latest in our 'meet the committee' series of interviews features Michele Chan. As President of the UCL Music Society in 2020/21 Michele was *ex officio* a member of the CMC committee; we now welcome her as a committee member in her own right, elected at the recent Annual General Meeting and we look forward to her future contributions to the committee's work.

As always, we are keen to receive material for the next issue of the Newsletter: short notices, letters to the editors, concert and book reviews, full-length articles (max. 3000 words) – please send your proposals to any or all of us: Dace Ruklisa (dd.r:t@btinternet.com), Jill House (j.house@ud.ac.uk) and myself (rabeemus@gmail.com). And my thanks as ever to Dace and Jill for their work on the preparation of the present issue.

Roger Beeson, Chair, UCL CMC

slow movements (*Romance* and *Epilogue*) and clearly emphasised changes in the mood and transitions to different themes. On another occasion Mozart's Flute Quartet in D major was presented in a light and virtuosic manner. The timbre of the flute sounded bright; the performer created an impression of doing everything with tremendous ease. The cello counterpoint to melodies in high registers was pointed and prominent – often it moved forward the exchange of phrases between instruments. The middle movement had a misty and resigned feel – the melodies therein were unpredictable and the message ambiguous.

A wide range of vocal and instrumental chamber music was showcased at the fundraising concert for a new practice piano. The first piece in the programme produced mild astonishment. The first movement of Chopin's Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 65, began in a sombre mood. The pianist quickly switched between different registers and created a sense of rapid movement when rendering abundant chord durations. The cello playing was expressive and also exhibited strength; the latter characteristic was in fact necessary to withstand the weight of the opulent piano part. Both musicians smoothly took over various themes – important motifs were presented in turns by one or both instruments. Occasionally the cello melodies veered towards subtle melancholy, although this mood was never sustained for long. The third movement revealed an entirely different scenery – its atmosphere was dreamy and slightly austere. Capricious and fast piano durations were interspersed in the texture, not always at regular or predictable points. The cello playing was varied in terms of sound; the lengthy developments of melodies were carefully shaded and phrased; low cello register was widely used and yielded gruff sonorities. The piano accompaniment was ethereal and provided sparse and regular pulsation. In the second half of this concert a sextet united with a soprano soloist to perform Vivaldi's *Ostro pecta, armata spina*. This composition is an *introduzione* that was presented before a major liturgical work in Vivaldi's time. Although the text contemplates transient vanities of the world, the music is luminous and even sensuous in its elaborate vocal and instrumental lines. The singing was lucid and the piece was performed with a forward-looking enthusiasm. The middle recitative sounded thoughtful and also had a sense of urgency. The return to joy was all the more prescient in the last section; here the vocal ornamentations sounded particularly elegant amidst the rhythmical accompaniment of the instruments.

Diverse and sometimes unusual solo instruments were represented in CMC programmes. 'Fall of the Leaf' by Martin Peerson was played on the piano. The score of this piece had been copied in a seventeenth-century English prison by the hand of a well-connected Catholic, who was supplied with ink and other necessities; this composition might be among the most attractive items in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*. The pianist depicted falling leaves by carefully executed decorations and brief arpeggios surrounding the main theme. The playing was sustained in a

moderate tempo – it retained transparency and didn't seem crowded with musical detail that is present in the score due to emphasis on the central melody. Both the rhythm and the development of musical material were somewhat unpredictable. Afterwards

immediately engaged listeners in a tumultuous journey – according to the com-

Meet the committee – Michele Chan

Roger Beeson: *Michele, could you tell us a little about your background, and what brought you to UCL as a medical student in (I think) 2018?*

cathédrale engloutie', a prelude characteristic of Debussy's musical impressionism. From ethereal wave-like phrases, to profound block chords resembling the cathedral organ emerging and sinking back into the ocean, its lyricism still manages to leave me completely spellbound every time – both as a listener and a performer.

RB: *Could you say something about your activities and roles in the UCL Music Society?*

MC: I joined UCL Music Society as a fresher, singing in the Chamber Choir and playing violin in the Symphony Orchestra. I took up the position of Chamber Choir Manager in my first year, which introduced me to like-minded students outside of my own course – many of whom are still close friends of mine to this day. In my second year I became Vice President, where I was further exposed to the wide range of musical activities UCL has to offer. I was also in charge of the publicity aspect of our annual UCOpera production, a role which gave me the unique opportunity to meet with professional directors, producers, and critics.

In 2020 I was elected as President of the Society. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, I have had to make tough decisions to cancel various rehearsals and concerts for the safety of our members, most notably

with to work I was trying our best to use unconventional methods including virtual rehearsals via Zoom and virtual concerts.

RB:

al almost all activities have managed to continue. UCL offers a wide range of musical activities, both the Music Society and the Chamber Music Society.

MC: It's been a challenge to continue with our activities, but we've managed to adapt. We've had to cancel our annual UCOpera production, but we've managed to continue with our other activities. We've also had to cancel our virtual concerts, but we've managed to continue with our other activities. We've also had to cancel our virtual rehearsals, but we've managed to continue with our other activities. We've also had to cancel our virtual rehearsals, but we've managed to continue with our other activities.

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eg. both have the same goal of providing a high-quality musical experience for our members. We've managed to continue with our other activities, but we've had to cancel our virtual concerts, virtual rehearsals, and UCOpera production. We've also had to cancel our virtual rehearsals, but we've managed to continue with our other activities.

RB:

musicians of the time, Enrique Granados (piano) and Felipe Pedrell (composition). From 1923 to 1928 he studied with Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna and Berlin, and some of his compositions of the 1920s show the influence of Schoenbergian serialism. During the decade following his return to Barcelona, where he worked first as a Music Professor then as head of the music section of the Catalan Library, he produced compositions in a 'national' style. A sympathiser with the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, he left Spain in January 1939 as defeat loomed, and with the help of his friend the musicologist E.J. Dent eventually found a permanent home in the UK as a Research Scholar at King's College, Cambridge; in due course he took British citizenship. As well as a considerable amount of incidental music (for films, plays and radio), he wrote many large-scale works during his last three decades, including three ballet scores, an opera, four symphonies and other orchestral and chamber works. While his music of the 1940s shows strongly Spanish traits, in the 1950s and '60s he returned to his earlier avant-garde interests in a series of works in an experimental and highly individual style.

One might compare Gerhard with Igor Stravinsky, whose music likewise underwent some radical changes of style (Russian 'nationalist' – neo-classical – serialist). And as with Stravinsky, beneath the changes there are elements of continuity – a single musical 'personality' comes through. In particular, just as Stravinsky never entirely lost touch with his Russian roots, so Gerhard's Spanish, and specifically Catalan, heritage was important throughout his career. Gerhard's teacher Pedrell (1841-1922), whose pupils included Granados and Manuel de Falla as well as Gerhard, was a crucial figure in the development of Spanish 'national' music. He composed, collected folk songs and edited Renaissance music by Spanish composers (notably the works of Tomás Luis de Victoria). Gerhard paid homage to him in *Cancionero de Pedrell*, written for the Pedrell centenary in 1941 – settings of folk songs from various parts of Spain for voice with colourful chamber-orchestral ac-

succeeding decades (in 1963 and 1976).

Peter Racine Fricker was born in Ealing, West London. His great-grandmother was apparently a descendant of the great seventeenth-century French dramatist

brow? intellectual? pretentious? too clever by half? – that Amis disliked (to put it mildly). What it reveals about British attitudes to the ‘modern’ at the time is too large a topic to go into here. One might wonder whether Amis had in mind any particular piece by Fricker. It seems unlikely, given the rather motley collection of ‘musicians’ in this chapter of the novel; so why not invent a fictitious ‘modern’ composer? Amis would obviously have been capable of this; as it is, the joke seems rather stale.

Despite his relative neglect in the 1960s and ‘70s, Fricker’s sixtieth birthday was marked by the BBC in a series of no fewer than seven concerts in 1980, ‘Fricker in Retrospect’, which included his symphonies and the ambitious and impressive oratorio *The Vision of Judgement* (1957). Four years or so ago recordings of some of these performances were released as CDs on the BBC’s Lyrita label, and at about the same time the complete string quartets were recorded for Naxos by the young Villiers Quartet. This might perhaps have heralded a renewal of interest in Fricker; but nothing much seems to have happened since. Of course, as new composers emerge there is less room for some of those who decades ago were new; but concert programmers (especially on Radio 3) are not averse to reviving overlooked figures. Perhaps Fricker, as well as Gerhard, will eventually find a place among the ‘revived overlooked’.

Roger Beeson