

UCL Chamber Music Club



Newsletter, No. , February

In this issue:

Early brass at UCL
page

University College Opera
presents *The Snowmaiden* by
Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
page

Two American Christmas
carols
page

I first heard the sound of
bagpipes in Flanders
S.A.G Taylor's memories of the
First World War
page

and beyond –
repercussions of global crisis
and transformation in chamber
music
page

Welcome to our newsletter

Welcome to the second issue of the Chamber Music Club's Newsletter. As every pop singer, composer of symphonies, novelist etc. knows, it's the 'follow-up' to a successful debut – the second hit single/album, Symphony No. , the second novel – that can be difficult. Well, we hope we've produced a worthy successor to last October's Newsletter No. .

In this issue you will find two short articles of general interest which look back to Christmas and to some of our concerts which have involved early or 'period' wind instruments, a musical memory of the First World War from a family archive, and a wide-ranging survey of music in which serves as an introduction to a forthcoming CMC concert (13th Mar) of works from that eventful year:

The outbreak of the First World War is not the only non-musical anniversary to be marked in . William Shakespeare's 400th birthday occurs this year, and Shakespeare features in various ways in some of our season's remaining concerts, on 14th February, 15th April and 16th May (luncheon time). For information about all our concerts don't forget to keep an eye on the website:

www.ucl.ac.uk/amber-music/diary

My thanks are due to all our contributors, and to Dace Ruklisa for editing this issue. Articles and ideas for articles are always welcome from members: please contact Dace (ruklisa@ebi.ac.uk), Helene (Helene.Albrecht@gmx.net) or myself (rabeemus@gmail.com) if you are interested in contributing. The third issue of the Newsletter is scheduled for October , which may seem a long way ahead – but is not so far away that you shouldn't start thinking about it now!

Roger Beeson, Chair of UCL CMC

Early brass at UCL

Two American Christmas carols

In 1841 Edmund Sears, pastor of the Unitarian church in Wayland, Massachusetts, wrote his most famous hymn: 'It Came Upon a Midnight Clear/ at Glorious Song of Old'...It was soon set to music by a fellow Yankee, Richard Storrs Willis, a pupil of Mendelssohn, and became one of America's most loved Christmas offerings. Two decades later a carol by another Massachusetts man became as popular: Phillips Brooks, author of the poem 'O, Little Town of Bethlehem', was a very proper Bostonian, who chose to serve as an Episcopalian priest in Philadelphia rather than enter business. He wrote it when he visited the Holy

I first heard the sound of bagpipes in Flanders S.A.G Taylor's memories of the First World War

It was in the First World War that I first heard the bagpipes played. My Regiment, the King's Own, was brigaded with the first battalion of the Gordon Highlanders, and on one cold winter morning when we were billeted in villages behind the lines in France and Flanders I used to hear their piper playing the reveille. Beginning with a slow drone, like the yawn a sleeper gives on first awakening the tempo would gradually quicken as they marched up and down the narrow streets, till at last, with the drums beating the quick step, the skirl of the pipes would rise to a pitch of wild rapture. "I°" "a o

and beyond – repercussions of global crisis and transformation in chamber music

In September 1914 the celebrated British music critic and musicologist Ernest Newman uttered in *Musical Times*: ‘How, we musicians may ask, can we contemplate without alarm and regret a possible setback to the culture that, be its faults what they may has given us Wagner and Brahms and Strauss and Hugo Wolf? He observed that ‘music has lauded truly commanding personalities and really vitalizing forces’ and assumed that a new order of things will create new ideas and figures the world would long for. In other words, one could only hope ‘that the result of the war will not be a perpetuation of the old racial hatreds and distrusts but a new sense of the emotional solidarity of mankind.’

When Austria declared war on Serbia on the 28th July 1914 artists, scientists, authors, politicians and diplomats all over the globe were in fact hit in the middle of transformation processes that were on their ways for almost four decades. Romanticism had slowly come to an end and the dominance of a European bourgeoisie declined in the face of growing tensions between different social classes. Industry, technology and international trade had advanced life-changing innovations including trams, motor cars, aeroplanes, gramophone and telephone; international trade and new business practices had created unprecedented wealth and luxurious life styles. A world view based on mechanical physics was undermined by quantum physics and the special theory of relativity; people’s self-understanding was shifted by the exploration of the unconscious. These profound changes were reflected in music on two different levels: they propelled the transformation of music language resulting in the dissolution of tonality and reorganisation of musical structures and they stimulated engagement with modernism on a broader level.

A cross-section of chamber music from 1914 offers insights into the diversity of reactions that depended on places, national preferences and overall societal conditions. The revival of folkloristic heritage in Central Europe took place alongside German-Austrian endeavour to intensify compositional processes; the absorption of jazz and indigenous music in America ran simultaneously with persiflage and irony in France and Russia. Trends towards cult, religion and spirituality were complemented by a strengthened appetite for perfection and accuracy, the latter standing in line with the epoch also

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Desire for an expansion of the tonal system had driven composers in Europe since Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and Liszt's *Années de Pèlerinage*; it became most visible in works of Claude Debussy and Arnold Schönberg. However, it was not only a pioneering spirit that moved new harmonic advances but also profound changes in societal life: Arnold Schönberg's string sextet *Verklärte Nacht*

F :
S P ' *Sarcasms Op. 17*
S R ' *From the Gospel of St John*

Trapped between the brutalities of the autocratic Tsarist regime and the destructive forces of revolutionary socialism composers in Russia experienced violent transformations of their nation's heritage in addition to the battles of World War I. Avant-garde and the arts would be supported under Lenin as long as they were 'rooted in, and grow with, [the broad masses of] workers' feelings, thoughts and desires.' Yet composers such as Prokofiev, Stravinsky and Rakhmaninov had already discovered and developed their own musical styles before the dawning of the war and continued their individual paths in exile afterwards.

Prokofiev's piano music possesses characteristics such as sarcasm, textural lightness, rhythmic energy and neo-classical traits. Recourse to classical forms

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M R ' P T A
E S ' *Sports et divertissements*

Musical economy and intensification became programmatic in France around the turn of the century. Maurice Ravel, son of an engineer, was desperate to enlist as a pilot during the First World War but ended up as a truck driver in Verdun due to poor health and his age. The outbreak of the war accelerated his work on Piano Trio in A minor; it counts as a masterwork of its genre given its richness of colour and texture. The Trio is partially based on Basque themes and dances and thus refers to the composer's mother's country of origin. The folkloristic elements, including rhyme schemes of Malay poetry, are combined with classical and innovative compositional tools, the latter consisting of arpeggios, trills, tremolos and glissandos and the use of extreme registers of all three instruments. Cosmopolitan by nature ('it would be dangerous for French composers to ignore systematically the works of their foreign colleagues [...]: our musical art, so rich at the present time, would soon degenerate and become isolated by its own academic formulas'), Ravel consciously connected to the European avant-garde after the war, and in particular engaged with music by Berg, Schönberg and Stravinsky despite his pronounced disapproval of German military aggression.

As a transitional figure and one of the most controversial composers of his time Erik Satie vigorously rejected German Romanticism; he aimed at developing an economical style inspired by Gothic art and Mediaeval music in order to avoid emotional excesses and gigantism of the late Romantic epoch. Ravel's composition is a synthesis of the late Romantic and the early 20th-century styles.

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music, sounds of bands and corps and many others. The urban cacophony of his youth was complemented with studies at Yale University with the German-trained teacher Horatio Parker. Knowledge of Bach's and Beethoven's music in tandem with his father's pioneering attitudes (George Ives would experiment with quarter tones and multi-tonality) turned Ives into a modernist *per se*. A carefree dealing with tonality, the latter seen as one of many possibilities, simplicity of tunes paired with rhythmic complexities and use of a huge range of genres and styles in his compositions made Ives a unique, revolutionary and influential for succeeding generations of composers; he became a cult figure in the US. Throughout his life Ives, who successfully ran a life insurance business, fostered the mutual inspiration of music and business, stating that 'it is my impression that there is more open-mindedness and willingness to examine carefully the premises underlying a new or unfamiliar thing in the world of business than in the world of music.' Charles Ives perfectly embodied the simultaneous attempts of European contemporary composers to democratise and normalise musical occupations; for Ives 'it is not even uncommon in business intercourse to sense a reflection of philosophy... akin to strong sense of beauty in art'. This insight should protect us from the assumption 'that business is a material process, and [from] an undervaluation of the average mind and heart.'

In 1904 Ives completed work on his third Violin Sonata, one of a set of four that were written over a period of more than a decade. The violin sonatas can be seen as an ideal introduction to Ives' creative work: they contain his entire compositional toolkit from polytonality, clusters and twelve-tone rows to metrical modulation. In addition they can be seen as a coherent cycle, whereby one sonata builds upon the achievements and breakthroughs of the preceding. The third Sonata can be considered as a major work of the composer. Its first and fourth movements are based on hymn melodies whereas the second movement challenges pianists' skills as a ragtime inspired dance. Inserted comments such as '*repeat only if ragged*' or '*play only if ragged*' recall Erik Satie and his taste for profanity; indeed, the music is oriented towards the theatre ragtime of Ives'