

10 April, 4.30pm, 5pm, 5.30pm & 6pm, St Katharine Cree

Welcome

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow is delighted to be performing as part of 'f r a g m e n t s': a festival celebrating 100 years of T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. We hope that you will enjoy the other events and performances that are happening today as part of 'Celebration V'. There are ten other events all happening within walking distance from 4:30pm to 7:30pm and your ticket grants you entry to all of these, so please do explore all the festival has to offer. More information can be found on the festival website (thewasteland2022.com) or [click here](#) for a list of all events.

The orchestra will be performing two 15-minute 'fragments' as part of today's festival, each will be played twice. This means you have four opportunities to hear us during the afternoon.

Our programme today features music written in the last 100 years. Our first fragment includes a relatively unknown work by Arvo Pärt for 14 string instruments, bell and bass drum, entitled *Mein Weg*, followed by the enigmatic first movement of Elizabeth Maconchy's *Music for Strings*.

Our second fragment centres around Britten's *Sinfonietta*, Op. 1, a piece the composer wrote at 18 years old. The work, heavily influenced by the European avant-garde of Schoenberg and Berg, is perfectly formed in three short movements. With this work we have paired Arvo Pärt's *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, written as an elegy to the composer who he greatly admired.

We hope you enjoy our performances, as well as the other exciting and varied offerings in the 'f r a g m e n t s' festival today.

Alex Fryer

Academy of St Mary-le-Bow, Artistic Director

Programme

4.30pm & 5.30pm

Mein Weg

A. Pärt
(b. 1935)

Music for Strings,

I. Molto Moderato

E. Maconchy
(1907 - 1994)

5pm & 6pm

Cantus In Memoriam Benjamin Britten

A. Pärt
(b. 1935)

Sinfonietta

Op. 1

B. Britten
(1913 - 1976)

I. Poco presto ed agitato

II. Variations

III. Tarantella

Programme Notes

Arvo Pärt

Mein Weg

- Arvo Pärt is a minimalist Estonian composer who was born in 1935 and is still alive today.
- Pärt grew up while Estonia was still under Soviet control. During this time, he only had access to music that passed Soviet censors and the occasional illegal score or recording that had to be smuggled into the country. After studying composition, he spent almost 10 years working as a sound engineer for Estonian Radio alongside composing.
- Pärt's early style was, unsurprisingly, similar to composers such as Shostakovich. He later explored the European avant-garde, making use of dodecaphony, collage techniques and serialism (invented by German composer Arnold Schoenberg) but he received criticism for showing his 'susceptibility to foreign influences'.
- Pärt's unique compositional style proved controversial in the USSR and after struggling with Soviet officials for some time, he was allowed to emigrate to Vienna in 1980. He then moved to Berlin, where he landed contracts with Universal Editions and ECM Records. However, after Estonia regained independence in 1991, the relationship between the composer and his home country was restored and his music is now widely performed and celebrated across Estonia where he now lives.
- During the 1970s, Pärt withdrew from composition for almost eight years and dedicated himself to a deep exploration of early music, especially Renaissance choral music, Gregorian chant and other medieval music. In his own words, Pärt discovered 'how to walk all over again'. During this time, he converted to Orthodox Christianity.
- After this period of research, Pärt came up with his own unique compositional style/technique which he called 'Tintinnabuli' (from the Latin for 'Bell'). The style is musically very simple, drastically reducing sound to its essential parts with usually only two voices: one stating only three notes (the three notes of any given triad) which sound like bells, and the other a stepwise line in the same key as the triad. This style was Pärt's way of achieving clarity in music. He commented that 'the complex and many-faceted only confuses me, and I must search for unity.'

- The work *Mein Weg* is a transcription of a piece originally written for organ in 1989. A few years later Pärt created a version for 14 strings and percussion. The title for the organ edition is *Mein Weg hat Gipfel und Wellentäler*, inspired by a short poem depicting the unpredictable rollercoaster of human life by Edmond Jabès. It reads: 'My path has long hours, / jolts and pains. / My path has peaks and sea-troughs, / sand and sky. / Mine or thine.'
- The texture of *Mein Weg* consists of three rhythmic layers, reflected in Pärt's instructions for the seating of the players. The front four players play only quavers, the middle row of players only crotchets (twice the length of a quaver), and the third layer of players minims (twice the length of a crotchet). These three lines share the same simple musical material; as the pitches ascend and descend at the different durations indicated, they in turn create the shifting harmonies and textures of the work – the peaks and sea troughs of the human path.

Elizabeth Maconchy

Music for Strings, I. Molto Moderato

- Elizabeth Maconchy is a hugely unsung composer of the 20th Century. She was a contemporary of composers such as Britten and Tippett.
- Maconchy attended the Royal College of Music, where despite her considerable talent she was denied the prestigious Mendelssohn scholarship, likely due to her gender. She has a memory of the college director telling her that she would 'only get married and never write another note' - This could not have been further from the truth, as Maconchy continued a fulfilling career as a composer. Though she did marry and have children she would frequently compose into the small hours of the morning whilst her children were sleeping.
- Maconchy studied composition under Ralph Vaughan Williams and later under Czech composer Karol Jiráček. Her compositional style was less 'British pastoral' and more 'modern European', taking influence from the contrasting and interlocking rhythms of Bartók and Janáček and the harmony of Berg.
- The 1930 BBC Proms featured a premiere of Maconchy's *The Land*, announcing her compositions on the world stage. During her career of almost 60 years, she composed over 200 works and was recognised with awards from the Daily Telegraph and the Worshipful Company of Musicians. She was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1977.
- *Music for Strings* was commissioned by the BBC for the 1983 season of the Proms. The first movement opens with rich chords in the lower register, with the harmony providing tension from the start. The music then fragments into a contrapuntal texture, growing in volume and pitch to break out into kaleidoscopic rhythms before returning to the sombre mood of the opening.

- Maconchy's music, much like that of her equally talented female contemporaries (such as Imogen Holst, Ruth Gipps and Grace Williams), has been under-represented on the concert platform since its composition, and still remains so today. In recent years sector wide emphasis on diversifying classical music programming is encouraging us to discover many more works by these fantastic female composers and performances can be heard much more regularly now than, say, ten years ago, though there is still more work to be done to bring this music to the fore.

Arvo Pärt

Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten

- Arvo Pärt wrote this work, for string orchestra and bell, in 1977. The piece was written as an elegy to mourn the death of Benjamin Britten, a composer who Pärt felt he had an affinity with. Pärt said that Britten's music had an 'unusual purity' which was something he aimed for in his own work. Due to the Soviet control of Estonia, Pärt only had access to a few scores and recordings of Britten's music on which to base his appreciation.
- The work is an early example of Pärt's 'Tintinnabuli' style. The whole piece revolves around a descending A minor scale (in stepwise movement), accompanied by single notes of an A minor triad (A,C,E).
- Pärt creates phrases that seem to grow exponentially by repeating the descending A minor scale, adding another note to the end of the pattern with each repetition. There are seven notes in the scale, so let's imagine that this is the seven-letter word 'Britten'. Pärt's phrase when written out would look like this: 'B Br Bri Brit Britt...' and so on.
- This musical phrase is played by all 5 sections of the string orchestra (first violin, second violin, violas, cellos and double basses), however, each section plays the same music at half the speed of the section before. This means that through the course of the six-minute piece, the first violins play 21 versions of the descending scale (to use the analogy above, they end up with a final phrase that would look like: 'Brittenbrittenbritte', spanning three octaves) but the second violins play at half that speed, so by the end they only play 14 versions of the repeated scale ('Brittenbrittenb'). The double basses play the slowest incarnation of the scale phrase, meaning that by the end of the piece they have only played one full scale ('Brittenb'). The piece is carefully constructed with staggered entries and when each section reaches its end point, it sustains a note of the A minor triad and waits for other sections complete their journeys.

Benjamin Britten

Sinfonietta, Op. 1

- Benjamin Britten was an English composer. He was born in 1913 in Lowestoft, and he died in Aldeburgh in 1976. As a composer he changed the face of English music, ushering in a fresh and contemporary English sound and he is often heralded as "the greatest English composer since Purcell".
- He studied piano and composition at the Royal College of Music, although he didn't particularly enjoy his time there. Britten was interested in the new ideas of the Second Viennese School, but the college prevented him from studying with Berg in 1934 (his composition teachers, Ireland and Vaughan Williams, were not interested such radical new music). However, Britten had been privately studying with Frank Bridge from before his time at the RCM, who he held in much higher esteem than his College teachers, and who strongly encouraged Britten's more progressive musical voice.
- Britten wrote his *Sinfonietta*, Op. 1 in just three weeks in the summer of 1932. Britten was clearly happy with the work, perhaps thinking of it as his first notable piece giving it the label of 'Opus. 1'. The work was premiered in January of 1933 at the Ballet Club, and despite a stressful rehearsal period, the performance was well received.
- A review of the premiere in The Times commented that Britten was 'striking out on a path of his own...he possesses a power of invention apart from the efficiency with which he handles his material' and it was clear that Britten had, even at the age of 18, found a compositional voice unlike any other.
- The whole work is constructed using very few musical ideas which are all heard in the opening bars. This economy of ideas gives unity to the three movements, though Britten reworks the material, allowing each movement is still remarkably varied in tone.
- The condensed structure of the *Sinfonietta* is notably sophisticated, a feature of Britten's writing that only becomes more assured as his works mature. In fact, in many ways this piece anticipates much of his later output in its use of form, variation and manipulation of material, economy of ideas and imaginative yet idiomatic use of instrumentation.
- The almost cellular style of composition is related closely to composition techniques used by the second Viennese school and composers such as Schoenberg and Berg, both of whom Britten admired. It has been proposed that Britten modelled the piece on Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony.

- The first movement of the work is in sonata form, it is angular and unsettled despite some calmer moments. The second movement is a set of variations on the motifs set out in the first, joining without a break to the third movement entitled 'Tarantella'.
- A tarantella is a folk dance originating in Italy, specifically in Taranto. The bite of a local spider ("tarantula" after the region) was believed to cause a hysterical condition causing the victim to move frantically, inspiring the folk dance. In a tarantella a dancer and drummer would try to upstage each other by playing or dancing faster than the other.
- Britten's output includes everything from operas (the most famous of which is *Peter Grimes*) to orchestral works and songs. Much of Britten's work focusses on the idea of being an outsider: 'the struggle of the individual against the masses.' Many think that this recurring theme is autobiographical and related to the fact Britten was gay.
- Homosexuality was illegal until 1967 in Britain and Britten had, at times, been under investigation from the police. Though his relationship with famous tenor Peter Pears was no secret, it was never explicitly announced. The Queen wrote a letter of condolence to Pears after Britten's death, the first letter of its kind known to recognise a same-sex relationship. Britten and Pears are buried next to each other in Aldeburgh.

Orchestra

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow is a unique and innovative orchestra based in the City of London. The ensemble is made up of outstanding non-professional musicians, many of whom have graduated from the country's leading conservatories and are committed to making the highest quality orchestral music.

The ensemble performs around six major concerts a year across the city and holds a residency at the historic church of St Mary-le-Bow in the City of London. The orchestra is flexible in number, enjoying a huge variety of repertoire from well-known symphonic masterworks to more intimate concerts of Baroque and Classical repertoire and chamber music. Though the ensemble is regularly directed by its Artistic Director, Alex Fryer, it also frequently engages guest conductors as well as guest leaders for un-conducted performances.

Conductor

Alex Fryer

Alex read music at the University of Southampton, studying oboe performance as well as conducting. During his time there, he was assistant conductor to both the University Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra. After graduating, he pursued a post-graduate degree at the Royal College of Music in oboe performance.

During his time at the Royal College of Music, Alex played principal oboe with the RCM Symphony Orchestra in addition to taking part in multiple other ensemble projects including contemporary music groups and chamber music recitals. Since graduating with a distinction in 2016, Alex has enjoyed a career as a freelance musician.

In 2019 he joined Southbank Sinfonia for a year-long orchestral fellowship and has recently enjoyed taking part in the Pathway Scheme at the Wigmore Hall, training as a music leader for education and participation work. During the pandemic, Alex trained as a Covid-19 vaccinator, which he still does alongside his musical work.

Players

Violin I

Sean Dunn (Leader)
Chris Hirschman
Ilana Ledermann
Anahita Falaki
Andrew Lee
Vivien Plekhotkine*

Violin II

Ellen Dunn
Harri Caddick
Henry Gleave
Elizabeth Humphrey
Sarah Benson
Jess Cselko

Viola

Ed Daley
Will Emery
Lara Wassenberg
Georgie Davies*

'Cello

Grace Dunn
Natalie Bevan
Rachel Flint
Chris Hedges*

Bass

Cathy Lear
Eleanor Roberts

Flute

Zara Jealous

Oboe

David Hedley*

Clarinet

Dan Mort

Bassoon

James Branchflower

Horn

Thomas Allard

Percussion

Keith Price*

* Denotes guest