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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 birth-year 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.rr.tt@btinternet.com), Jill House (j.house@ucl.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

A nostalgic view on the 68th season

The 68th season was intense and introspective and ended abruptly. Its twelve concerts were dominated by small chamber ensembles – duos, trios and quartets. The presented compositions for solo instruments were frequently contemporary or experimental. In contrast, numerous rarities of vocal music were often excavated from Baroque and Romantic periods. The altered reality of the first lockdown shuffled memories of these events into a distance. Nevertheless the captivating performances heard last season encouraged revisiting less familiar pieces, this time either in thoughts or in recordings. A selection of vivid episodes from the CMC concerts will be retold in this article.

Instrumental chamber ensembles were the staple of the CMC programmes last season. The first movement of Britten's Sonata in C, Op.65, for cello and piano reminded us of an earlier era when keyboards were paramount in sonatas for string instruments. Here, the piano part was filled to the brim (or to the capacity of ten fingers) with many-noted chords and lavish textures, characteristic of sonatas for solo piano. Searching cello motifs at the beginning of the movement were rendered in a sharp and precise manner; they returned in a quieter and softer guise later. The most fascinating moments took place when both instruments engaged in dialogues based on these motifs. The pianist skilfully contrasted instrumental registers and created very rich sound within chord cascades. Towards the end of the movement the cellist concocted a hypnotic murmuring out of repetitive figurations, which would seem fairly boring when seen in the score. Borodin's Variations in G minor on a Russian song 'How have I offended thee?' were presented by a trio of student performers (two violins and a cello). The lyrical main theme was adorned with varied imitations of motifs – the latter had a prominent role in this piece and deftly amplified the recurring melancholic atmosphere. The musicians' playing blended together well in terms of timbres and dynamics, creating dense and full-bodied sound. The performers successfully conveyed the dance-like character of some variations. This Borodin Trio was far from being the only rarely performed string ensemble work in CMC programmes. The Second String Quartet by Ralph Vaughan Williams first augured and then ushered in a rather complex emotional world. Initially the viola introduced a degree of anguish; resolute and ambivalent viola melodies were scattered throughout the composition and often were crucial for its development. The music of the two violins seemed to float around as if tossed by winds in the *Allegro appassionato* and *Scherzo*, creating a slightly chilly atmosphere (also note the harmonic instability of these instrumental parts). Throughout the whole work the composer surprised with the inventiveness of his harmonies. The *Romance* movement seemed to seek solace in earlier musical periods – a sort of Renaissance polyphony could be glimpsed in the contemplative conversations of instruments; the sparser sections could be easily imagined being played by a consort of viols. The musicians didn't rush the

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 figurations. 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 figurations 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 picta, 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 *The Fall of the Leaf* for solo cello by Imogen Holst was performed. The vaguely solitary feel of 'Fall of the Leaf' by Martin Peerson on which Holst's variations were based was even more pronounced in Holst's work. The cellist vividly depicted leaves by pizzicati, quick strokes, dry sonorities and harmonics. Various strands of musical material were successfully assembled together towards the end, when the main theme was juxtaposed with pizzicati hinting at preceding variations. At another concert several pieces from *Mr. Leonard's Second Booke* of compositions from 1500s or 1600s were played on the bass viol. 'John come kiss me now' sounded lively and was imbued with a cautiously teasing tint. The phrasing was fine and well rounded. This composition was appropriately followed by pieces named 'Come live with me and be my love' and 'Who liveth so merry', although the last item turned from personal vagaries to broader social realms and lack of equality. The performance of 'Come live with me and be my love' quickly erupted in an exuberant dance; the rhythm and sound were precisely controlled. The performance of Schubert's Impromptu in B flat at a lunchtime concert fascinated with polarities of textures and moods. In particular the gradual and ample swing from the intimate and calm introduction to unrestrained gloom and sense of heaviness of life around the middle of the piece was impressive. Scriabin's solo piano works of various genres were played on several occasions last season. The first piece of Four Preludes, Op.22, began in a questioning manner – the questions themselves remained unanswered until its end. The pianist ingrained the whole cycle with intensity of feeling and the interpretation abounded in improvisatory spirit. The musician's eye was firmly kept on the proportions and tempos within the set.

Almost all solo songs that were heard in CMC concerts last season belong to the less performed repertoire of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Compositions by Clara Schumann have regularly featured in CMC programmes over recent years. The rendering of 'Ich stand in dunklen Träumen' from *Sechs Lieder*, Op. 13, seemed like an unhurried exposition of dreams and hopes, some of them possibly hidden from the outside world. 'Der Mond kommt still gegangen' evoked a strange atmosphere, simultaneously radiant and eerie. The piano accompaniment did not convey any signs of overt romanticisation and was pensive, while the voice encompassed a broad range of dynamics. When listening to a song by Lili Boulanger, 'Dans l'immense tristesse', the composer's multilayered and colourful harmonies were immediately apparent. The singing was resigned, communicating sadness without a sense of tragedy. The singer's transitions between phrases and voice registers were smooth and the natural evolution of emotion was never interrupted. The piano part attracted attention with sensitively played motifs in high registers, which complemented the vocal line, and

with dissonant and energetic chord sequences in the middle of the song. At another concert three songs by Gabriel Fauré were presented. 'Les roses d'Ispahan' was sung with a great clarity of voice; sensual delights were tranquilly meditated upon. Musicians subtly introduced a tinge of sorrow at the lines of the poem dealing with separation. Both the theme of the poem and the image of butterfly linked this song with 'Le papillon et la fleur'. Nimble waltzing set the mood of the latter piece. The voice conveyed joy, disappointment and anxiety in turns, all of these caused by a turbulent union of a flower and a butterfly. Transitions between flirtation and tension were seamlessly executed.

Choral pieces provided the backbone for last year's Christmas concert. The festive evening began with 'In dulci jubilo' by Dietrich Buxtehude. The interplay between the choir and string instruments and continuo was finely attuned. The atmosphere was that of cautious jubilation amidst reflection. The piece was built on repetitions of themes and their variations; contrast was created by a lively passage for violins towards the end. In Jean Mouton's 'Noe, psallite' the singers demonstrated a high level of musicianship when tackling its intricate polyphony – the music smoothly flowed forward and became more and more immersive leading to forgetfulness of worldly and mundane matters. Several twentieth-century compositions in the middle of the programme provided further stylistic diversity. 'The Virgin's Cradle Hymn' by Edmund Rubbra was sensitively interpreted by the choir: there was warmth amidst subdued dynamics and nuanced phrasing.

There was plenty of experimentation within CMC programmes last year. The trio of performers of *Music using amplified plant materials* by John Cage was equipped with rulers and paper knives, both wooden and metal, and brought several cacti to the stage. The sounds arising from touching cacti with these tools were electronically amplified: the resulting sonorities were diverse and unlikeness of materials and strokes could be experienced. There were lots of short repetitions of sounds and brief resonances in the room. Initially the dynamics were quiet, with plenty of silences in between 'motifs': it heightened the attentiveness of the audience. Diminishing lengths of pauses and increasing overlaps between performers' cactus strokes created suspense and development within the performance. At another concert two sequences of solo piano pieces about dogs were presented. The melodies of *Doggone Blues* by Dorian Ford were angular and involved changing pace and rhythms and quite a few jazz inflections. The underlying blues figures were never dragging. The modal and occasionally bi-tonal harmonies of *Rubber Dog (O cachorrinho de borracha)* by Heitor Villa-Lobos were presented in a relaxed manner. These were augmented with dissipated melodies eventually paving the way to an imitation of dog barking. The pianist played the fast cascades of figurations with brilliance and renewed energy.

A separate concert was devoted to UCL composers and musicians closely connected to London. *Asari* for solo piano by the CMC composer Belinda Samari

immediately engaged listeners in a tumultuous journey – according to the composer the music depicts searching or ‘rummaging’ for meaning. Around the middle of the piece the music became lithe and sequences of chords were played with a sort of optimistic spite. The performance never lost its fervour and impression of movement; both the concept of the piece and its execution were romantic. Several piano compositions by Howard Skempton were presented on this same evening – they possessed distinctive harmonic language and recognisable style. Howard Skempton does not always indicate speed and dynamics in his scores. Some pieces, like *Of Late* played at this concert, go even further in indeterminism and are based on a series of chords with only approximately defined rhythm. Skempton’s *Rumba* was a whimsical and occasionally acerbic take on the Latin American dance – the performance was rhythmically robust and engaging, but certainly didn’t evoke festivities in a warm climate, rather it could have enriched the vibes of a party in London. Immediately afterwards *Adam-Blues* for trombone and piano by Joseph Horowitz was played. This piece had been commissioned for a presentation event of a new magazine about arts and architecture taking place in the late sixties. The composition was based on a recurring motif, which was adorned by multiple novel melodies; the feel of a slowly evolving jazz composition was shaken up by a sudden eruption of irregular chord progressions and more dissonant themes. The playing was free and fluid. Rondo in G for solo piano by another CMC composer Jo Pearson was based on Latin American rhythms that were rigorously applied throughout the whole piece. The music was jovial and occasionally a bit jumpy, with a number of distinct melodies – it was inspired by the composer’s experiences of stewarding in the Globe Theatre.

Two trademark features of the CMC are continuity of music making and mutability of repertoire and programmes. These aspects have helped in successfully adapting to the 69th season with its Covid-related constraints: so far nearly one virtual concert per month during term time has been broadcast to fairly large audiences (imagine the equivalent of the Haldane Room being full of people and some listeners sitting on the tables at the back of the room). The CMC performers keep finding interesting and less played pieces to present even when the size of ensembles is limited by remote rehearsing and recording. The momentum of music making is already here and is waiting for expansion if not explosion in the 70th CMC season.

Dace Ruklisa

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?*

Michele Chan: I joined UCL in 2018, and am now about to enter my fourth year of Medical School. UCL was the obvious choice for me for many reasons, not least because of its pioneering research, world-renowned teaching hospitals, and welcoming community.

While pursuing medicine has always been a dream of mine, being able to continue enjoying the arts at university was also very important to me – to this end, there is no better place than London. Indeed, in pre-pandemic times, weekends were seldom spent in libraries (perhaps with the exception of exam season...), but rather at concerts in the Royal Festival Hall or ballets at the Royal Opera House!

RB: *And please tell us about your musical background and musical experience before you came to UCL.*

MC: Music has played a prominent role in my life since I was young. I started learning the piano and violin from around four-years-old, later achieving Diplomas of Music Performance (ABRSM) in both instruments. In secondary school, I took lessons on the church organ and played for chapel services regularly.

As the Sixth Form Music Scholar at Wycombe Abbey School, I was given the opportunity to be concertmaster of the Chamber Orchestra, where I led performances in London and abroad in Rome and Sorrento on our Europe tour. Choral singing is another passion of mine – I had been singing in choirs for over ten years even before coming to UCL, and particularly enjoyed overseas tours with our school choir, where we most memorably sang in a mass at the stunning St Peter's Basilica in Vatican City.

In 2018, I was honoured to perform the first movement of Schumann's Piano Concerto as the solo pianist at the beautiful venue of St John's Smith Square in London with the school Symphony Orchestra, perhaps the highlight of my musical background before UCL.

RB: *Do you have any special 'likes' or preferences for particular composers or types of music, as a performer or listener?*

MC: This really changes from time to time, but my all-time favourites as a listener would have to be the great romantic pieces – the Sibelius and Brahms violin concertos immediately spring to mind. Saint-Saëns's Symphony No. 3, 'Organ', is also a current favourite.

As a chorister, apart from Fauré's Requiem (an obvious choice!), I've also really enjoyed performing Whitacre's 'The Seal Lullaby' and Caccini's *Ave Maria*. On the piano, my favourite and most frequent choice to perform would be 'La

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 the much-anticipated UCOpera. Nevertheless, I step down from my presidency with mostly positive sentiments, as I was able to work with an amazingly dedicated committee throughout the year, trying our best to continue with music-making as much as possible, albeit in more unconventional ways (including online auditions, rehearsals via Zoom, and virtual concerts).

RB: *The last fifteen months have been difficult for everyone of course, and music-making activities have almost ground to a halt. What are your thoughts about the future of music in UCL once the situation is more or less back to normal? How can things develop in both the Music Society and the Chamber Music Club?*

MC: It is difficult to predict when things will go back to normal, and what the future 'normal' might look like. Promisingly, while music-making activities may have been severely affected, the interest and devotion to music from UCL students has not wavered. In fact, despite auditions being held online over Zoom, we had a record number of applicants for both the Chamber Choir and Symphony Orchestra this year. I would argue that the fifteen-month hiatus has, perhaps, even strengthened UCL community's resolve to contribute to the arts.

Furthermore, social distancing measures have compelled both the Music Society and Chamber Music Club to come up with more creative ways of music-making. I look forward to the further development of such new ideas, and integration with pre-pandemic practices once government regulations allow. With the talent and dedication that I have witnessed from both the staff and student body at UCL, I certainly hold great hope and confidence that music at UCL will emerge stronger and better looking ahead.

RB: *Many thanks, Michele, for this informative interview.*

The year 2020: not just the Beethoven anniversary

Last year, 2020, was of course the Beethoven year – the 250th anniversary of the great composer’s birth; and even though planned live events may not have survived the pandemic, Ludwig van Beethoven was widely celebrated across a variety of media, including BBC Radio 3. Indeed, the Beethoven anniversary seems to have obscured a number of other anniversaries that might have received at least some attention. Possible candidates include Louis Vierne (1870-1937), an important figure in the great French tradition of organist-composers, Franz Lehár (1870-1948), who dominated the ‘silver age’ of Viennese operetta in the early decades of the twentieth century, and Max Bruch (1838-1920), a prolific composer whose reputation should rest on more than the justly popular First Violin Concerto. However, I restrict myself to three lesser-known figures from this country, though with no intention of being unduly insular.

I start with a curiosity (or, a much-derided phrase, an ‘interesting historical figure’): St. Godric (d.1170). He was born in Norfolk, and after an adventurous early life (merchant, seafarer, possibly pirate) he underwent a religious conversion, undertook various pilgrimages and then settled as a hermit at Finchale near Durham where he spent his remaining sixty or so years and was renowned for his ascetic lifestyle, frugal diet and kindness to animals. The year 2020 marked the 850th anniversary of his death; if, as sometimes stated, he was born in 1070, we would in addition have a 950th anniversary to celebrate. In fact he has been credited with an even longer life, with birth dates of either 1069 or 1065, but it is more likely that the combination of extreme sanctity and undoubted longevity gave rise to exaggerated estimates of his life-span. For students of music history Godric is notable for his songs, a handful of which are preserved in a thirteenth-century manuscript. They are monophonic (i.e. consisting of just a single melodic line), and Godric’s religious texts are written in the vernacular (Middle English) rather than Latin. It is this last feature which makes them important as the earliest examples we have of such compositions in this country. The notation of the songs is essentially the same as that used for plainsong, so while the pitches are unproblematic their rhythmic rendition is not certain, and of course the manuscript gives no other indication of how they would have been performed. If you do a quick internet search you will find at least three recordings of Godric’s songs on YouTube, showing contrasting approaches by twenty-first-century performers.

We move on eight centuries, to the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Roberto Gerhard (1896-1970). He was born in Catalonia; his father was Swiss, his mother from Alsace. As a young man he had lessons with two of the outstanding Spanish

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 accompaniments – and more substantially in the Symphony 'Homenaje a Pedrell'; the latter, also dating from 1941, makes use of themes from Pedrell's opera *La celestina*. Other 'Spanish' scores from this period include the ballets *Don Quixote* (1940-41), *Alegrías* (1943, a 'Flamenco divertimento'), and *Pandora* (1942-43). Catalan melodies and rhythms, transformed, feature largely in *Pandora* – not only secular songs but also a fourteenth-century pilgrims' hymn. The five-movement orchestral suite from the ballet (whose original scoring was for two pianos and percussion, reminiscent of works by Stravinsky and Béla Bartók) provides a good introduction to Gerhard's music of the 1940s – a powerful score which perhaps reflects something of the times in which it was written.

Gerhard's 'modernist' turn in the 1950s still found room for Spanish references. For example, the Catalan song 'El cotiló', one of his *Fourteen Catalan Folk Songs* of 1928, which appears in the first movement of 'Homenaje a Pedrell', can be found in various guises in later works, notably the final version of the Fourth

Symphony (1965-68). Commentators have sometimes had difficulty distinguishing genuine folk songs in Gerhard's music from what are simply folk-like musical ideas, especially where phrases of just a few notes are concerned. His last two completed works, for chamber ensembles, are *Libra* (1968) and *Leo* (1969) – the titles being the zodiac signs of respectively Gerhard and his wife Leopoldina ('Poldi'); towards the end of each a clarinet motif appears – is this from a Catalan folk song, as has been suggested, or something of more general significance? What might be called the 'reconciliation of opposites' – the 'folk' and the avant-garde – is illustrated by his own account of composing the Concerto for Harpsichord, Strings and Percussion (1955-58): 'I could mention the case of the serial integration of an anonymous, completely tonal little tune which appears towards the end of the third movement...I used to wake up in the morning with that little tune going round and round in my head, out of nowhere and refusing to be shaken off. In the end the whole business became so obsessive that I could not see any way out other than letting the tune in.'

It is not only Spanish or other folk styles or simple diatonic tunes which find their way into Gerhard's works. The Violin Concerto, composed between 1942 and 1945 during the Second World War, contains a clear quotation from the French national anthem the 'Marseillaise' – presumably a deliberate political gesture; the finale of the First Symphony (1952-53, not to be confused with the 'Pedrell' Symphony) has a dotted-rhythm figure easily identifiable as a reference to Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*; quotations from Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste* can also be found in the same symphony. According to Gerhard himself, the second movement of the Violin Concerto is structured around the note-row of Schoenberg's String Quartet No.4 – the work was indeed composed as a tribute to Schoenberg for his seventieth birthday.

Rhythm is of course a vital aspect of Spanish folk music with its regional dances, and Gerhard's output is full of rhythmic life and Spanish rhythms. Among many examples one can cite 'The Quest', the first movement of the *Pandora* suite, the last movement of the Harpsichord Concerto, and the scherzo-like fifth section of the Third Symphony ('Collages', 1960).

Then there is Gerhard's individual sound-world. His imaginative and sometimes unusual instrumentation shows a particular penchant for percussion, tuned and untuned, as well as a 'Spanish' element (for example, the inclusion of guitar in *Concert for 8* (1968) and *Libra*, and the violin's imitation of *cante jondo* flamenco singing in the latter). Gerhard was also one of the UK's pioneers in exploring the possibilities of electro-acoustic music. Works such as the Third Symphony incorporate electronic tape into orchestral scoring. Equally interesting is the influence of electronic sound on his writing for instruments – for example, the 'white noise' of orchestral note-clusters in the Fourth Symphony and in the accordion part of the *Concert for 8*.

In 1973 the London Sinfonietta put on a concert series consisting of the complete chamber/ensemble works of Gerhard and Schoenberg. In 1996 Gerhard's centenary was marked by concerts both in the UK and in Spain (where his music had been effectively banned during the Franco years). Subsequently the BBC Symphony Orchestra made a series of fine recordings of Gerhard's orchestral works. The same orchestra had commissioned his 1965 Concerto for Orchestra. The BBC itself commissioned the Second Symphony in 1957, the cantata *The Plague* (1964, based on the novel by Albert Camus), and *Libra*. Why has the anniversary of this fascinating composer passed largely unnoticed, including by the BBC which even in these locked-down times would have been able to do something about it? It is to be hoped that a revival will be forthcoming in due course. Fortunately Gerhard has not lacked scholarly attention. The University of Huddersfield – noted for its promotion of contemporary music – houses the Gerhard archive; and in July of this year it will hold an online conference entitled 'Roberto Gerhard (1896-1970): Re-appraising a Musical Visionary'. A reappraisal by the wider music establishment would be very welcome.

Finally, 2020 marked the centenary of the composer Peter Racine Fricker (1920-90). If the reaction to this name is not simply 'who?', at least it prompts the question 'why isn't Peter Racine Fricker better known nowadays?' Two factors go some way towards explaining his current neglect. Firstly, for the last two-and-a-half decades of his life he was living and working on the west coast of the USA, so in simple geographical terms he was removed from British musical life (at least as a constant presence, although visits and performances in the UK did continue). Secondly, in addition to geography there is chronology: it could be argued that he was born at the wrong time. As a composer absorbing and responding to musical developments on the continent he was, perhaps, more indebted to such influences than slightly older and already established figures such as William Walton, Michael Tippett and Benjamin Britten. Of course, these composers were well aware of European 'modern' music – famously, Britten had wished to study with Alban Berg, a project aborted by Berg's death – but by the later 1940s and '50s they were, to borrow a phrase, the 'acceptable face' of musical modernism in the UK, and they had developed strong and characteristic musical 'voices'. Britten in particular, a consummate musician and a composer of enormous facility in a range of genres, represented modern music for many listeners. On the other hand, Fricker's brand of modernism, with his embrace of traditional genres – symphony, concerto, string quartet, even oratorio – was overtaken in the later 1950s and '60s by the much more radical (sometimes iconoclastic) avant-gardism represented by the 'Manchester School', in particular Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle, both born in 1934. Nevertheless, Fricker was a figure to be reckoned with in his early maturity. An indication of this and of his subsequent neglect can perhaps be seen in the programming of the BBC Proms: his works appeared six times in the Proms between 1951 and 1958, but thereafter only once in each of the two

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 Jean Racine – hence the unusual middle name. He studied at the Royal College of Music; his instrument was the organ, and for some time he was uncertain whether to pursue a career as a professional organist. His teacher for theory and composition was R.O. Morris, author of a standard textbook on counterpoint; the traditional training that he received undoubtedly fed into his emerging compositional style. After war service with the RAF, Fricker took lessons with the Hungarian-born Mátyás Seiber – his Fourth Symphony (1966) was written in memory of Seiber, a friend as well as a mentor. His career really took off with the success of his First Symphony, which won the Koussevitzky Prize in 1949. The First String Quartet of the previous year, a runner-up for the Edwin Evans prize for chamber music, further enhanced his reputation when it was taken up by the Amadeus Quartet in London and abroad. Numerous commissions followed in the next few years, for works including the Second Symphony, commissioned by the City of Liverpool for the 1951 Festival of Britain, and the Second String Quartet (1952-53), written for the Amadeus Quartet. From 1952 to 1964 he was musical director at Morley College in succession to Michael Tippett, and also taught composition at the RCM. In 1965, following his appointment to a professorship at the University of California, Fricker and his wife moved permanently to Santa Barbara.

Fricker was not a thorough-going serialist, but he was not averse to adopting what have been called ‘serial strategies’ in his later works, such as the Third String Quartet (1976). Certainly the close motivic and contrapuntal working which is characteristic of so much of his music relates him to Schoenberg. His harmonic and melodic language is often dissonant and freely atonal, although there are often vestiges of tonality, for example at the conclusions of the First and Second Symphonies. Fricker’s music can be quite tough and demanding for the listener, but it is well crafted, often exciting and replete with dramatic gestures. Although his music is generally in a ‘serious’ vein he was capable of a lighter touch, as in the *Comedy Overture* (1958), a piece of great rhythmic verve almost reminiscent of Walton in its effects.

At the end of Chapter 4 of Kingsley Amis’s 1954 novel *Lucky Jim*, Professor Welch, catching Jim Dixon making an exit from a dire musical evening, asks: ‘Aren’t you going to stay for the P. Racine Fricker?’ This remark perhaps tells us something about the ‘reception history’ of Fricker’s music. We can assume (I’m not the first to make this point) that readers would at least recognise the name, even without knowing any of the music. Nowadays most readers, never having heard of Fricker, would probably need to look him up on the internet or, if *Lucky Jim* were ever to be published in a ‘scholarly edition’ to consult the end-notes. We can also surmise that the name ‘P. Racine Fricker’ stood for something – high-

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 name for 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