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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.2, the second novel – that can be difficult. Well, we hope we've produced a worthy successor to last October's Newsletter No.1.

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 1914 which serves as an introduction to a forthcoming CMC concert (18th March) of works from that eventful year.

The outbreak of the First World War is not the only non-musical anniversary to be marked in 2014. William Shakespeare's 450th birthday occurs this year, and Shakespeare features in various ways in some of our season's remaining concerts, on 20th February, 29th April and 22nd May (lunchtime). For information about all our concerts don't forget to keep an eye on the website:

www.ucl.ac.uk/chamber-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 2014, 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

The UCL Chamber Music Club has occasionally called on the services of early brass performers to augment our instrumental forces for major works. For example, our production of the nativity section of Handel's *Messiah* for our Christmas concert in 2009 needed trumpets. It makes sense to use authentic baroque trumpets for such performances as these instruments blend much better with the voices of a small choir, lacking the stridency of modern trumpets in the high register due to their much shorter sounding lengths. The same concern arose with our performance of Bach's *Magnificat* in 2011 where three trumpets are called for in several major choruses. The Chamber Music Club has the good fortune to be able to recruit such players when needed.

A similar problem emerged with another great nativity piece, the *Christmas Oratorio* of Heinrich Schütz. Here several major sections call for sackbuts (as early trombones were called) as well as trumpets. We performed this in 2010, again with authentic instruments. Likewise in 2012, anniversary of the great Venetian composer Giovanni Gabrieli, we made use of our early brass connections to provide the sackbuts for a memorable performance of his masterpiece *In ecclesiis*.

These links have enabled us to explore some unusual and little heard repertoire. Few know that Mozart wrote a chamber piece or 'divertimento' for two flutes and five (!) trumpets, plus timpani (K.188). What this might sound like in the narrow confines of the Haldane Room with modern trumpets, flutes and timpani is anybody's guess, but with natural trumpets and baroque flutes as well as baroque timpani it proved to be an interesting piece. It showed the instrumentation as at least plausible, even if the piece itself is more of a curiosity than of any great musical value.

We have explored the possibility of augmenting our vocal forces by filling some of the parts with cornetts or sackbuts. It has always been difficult to recruit strong singers for tenor and bass lines; sackbuts make for an acceptable substitute. At the other end of the scale, the problem of recruiting boy sopranos to fill the upper parts is readily solved by using cornetts, which have a very 'vocal' quality to their sound. (The cornett was the virtuoso instrument in Venice during the early decades of the 17th century, before being usurped by the emerging preference for violins on the soprano line.)

We combined many of these aspects in an experimental concert on the 9th January 2014. Natural trumpets without valves (or vent holes – an invention from the 1960s!) blended with cornetts and sackbuts in an unusual Sonata a 7 by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer from his *Sacroprofanus Concentus* of 1662. This is one of the very few pieces from this period in which trumpets and cornetts are used together. An eight-part madrigal by Giovanni Gabrieli performed by

voices and instruments showed how effective the substitution of quiet sounding sackbuts for missing tenor and bass voices could be, and how the much brighter sound of the cornetts balanced the soprano voice. The use of natural trumpets in playing chorales was explored, which is believed to have been a custom within the Moravian Protestant communities of 16th-century Europe that was carried with them to America in the 18th century. Mutes were used in the lower trumpet parts of the well-known five part Toccata from Monteverdi's *Orfeo*. These are specified in the original score, but seldom adopted in practice. An authentic wooden mute, shoved into the bell of the instrument, raises its pitch by a semitone, necessitating some rapid re-tuning.

As this concert took place in the week before the Spring Term had actually started it was rewarding to have such a large and appreciative audience, though whether they had been attracted by the novelty of the items played or by the offer of a cider tasting in return for singing of some enthusiastic wassails to end the concert is uncertain.

Bill Tuck, January 2014

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

University College Opera, the opera company of the UCLU Music Society, is currently preparing a new production of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Snowmaiden*. Although the opera represents the mature period of the composer and was his own favourite, it has rarely been staged outside Russia.

The libretto is based on the play by Alexander Ostrovsky. Its plot is borrowed from a Russian folk tale that tells of the Snowmaiden's initiation into womanhood via discovery of love. Among its protagonists are tsars, forest sprites, wood-goblins, blind zither-players, Grandfather Frost, Spring Beauty and other creatures, both human and mythical and some in between. Nature plays a significant role throughout all four acts, as winter gradually gives way to spring, and the viewer is carried away to pagan, pre-Christian times.

A full English translation of the libretto has been made for this production by Christopher Cowell, the stage director. The troupe is having the first full rehearsal on Monday 24th February. Costume drawings and set-model are ready (designer Bridget Kimak), choreography has been worked in rehearsals, and staging will be finalised soon. These will be augmented by the lighting design of Jake Wiltshire. The opera will be conducted by Charles Peebles.

Performances will take place on the 24th, 26th, 28th and 29th March, at 7.30pm, in Bloomsbury Theatre. Tickets are now available from The Bloomsbury Theatre Box Office.

Two American Christmas carols

In 1849 Edmund Sears, pastor of the Unitarian church in Wayland, Massachusetts, wrote his most famous hymn: 'It Came Upon a Midnight Clear/That 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 Land in 1865; and before he went to Boston as Rector of Holy Trinity, Copley Square in 1869, he asked Lewis Redner, his organist in Philadelphia, to compose a tune for his poem – music which he nicknamed 'St Louis'.

Brooks' verses have an echo of Sears' earlier hymn and both were probably familiar with the Austrian carol, 'Silent Night'. Both knew and loved the little towns of New England; and immortalised their stillness, particularly on a clear winter night. Both men were troubled by events in America – the slavery conflict which erupted into war between North and South in 1861 – and for both the peace and truce of God was the true Gospel that would bring comfort to their nation. For Sears the heavenly angels were hopefully bringers of peaceful tidings. For Brooks, Bethlehem was like the little town of Wayland, Massachusetts, where the Boston female abolitionist, writer and Quaker, Lydia Maria Child, lived, and so in those dark streets shone forth 'the everlasting Light'.

These carols are loved on both sides of the Atlantic though often sung to different tunes. British choirs prefer Arthur Sullivan's version to Willis's rather simple tune for 'It Came Upon a Midnight Clear'; and use Vaughan Williams's arrangement of the folk song, Forest Medley, or Walford Davies's tune to perform Phillips Brooks's carol, 'O, Little Town of Bethlehem.' Christmas would not be Christmas without these offerings whether sung by Gospel singers, Kings College Choir or jazz musicians.

Clare Taylor, Orpington 2013

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 exaltation. Then, with the pulses rating, it would be impossible to stay in bed any longer. Of course, many Englishmen will say – and did say – that the noise was enough to awaken the dead, but I am still firmly convinced that the reveille played on the pipes is infinitely more effective than the bugle call which rouses other regiments and other services.

I heard the pipers play again and again in the years that followed, as they marched and countermarched in ceremonial array, or strode proudly forward at the head of their Regiment. I also heard them on cold, foggy autumn afternoons, when the trees stood bare and gaunt, playing that most poignant of all laments, 'The Flowers of the Forest', as they laid to rest those who would never return to their native land.

“The flowers of the forest are a' wede awa'.”

S.A.G Taylor was born in Jamaica and studied at University College School in Hampstead in the early years of the 20th century. He enlisted in his father's Regiment in 1314 and despite being severely wounded served in the trenches until he was demobbed in 1313. Subsequently he returned to Jamaica and later became a hydraulics engineer, in charge of the island's irrigation. After he retired he became a writer with a special interest in the capture of Jamaica by Cromwell's army during 1055-1000.

1914 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 set-back 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 lacked 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’s overall technological advances. The following selection of chamber music works dating back to 1914 (some of which will be featured at a UCL CMC concert on the 18th March 2014) describes some of these musical repercussions in relation to their contemporary perception and effects on subsequent creative processes.

OPPOSING DECADENCE:

ANTON WEBERN'S WORKS FOR VIOLONCELLO AND PIANO

Desire for an expansion of the tonal system had driven composers in Europe since Wagner's Tristan chord 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* Op. 4 from 1899 that displays the 'emancipation of the dissonance' is based on a poem by Richard Dehmel that reveals new attitudes to gender roles, public morals and integrity. Similar contents were dealt with in other major works by Schönberg such as *Pelleas und Melisande* Op. 5 and *Gurrelieder*, all testifying to a new search for values within a transforming society. As tensions grew between socialists, feminists, liberals and other societal groupings, composers in German-speaking territories increasingly turned to the reduction and simultaneous intensification of musical material, keen to avoid previous emblems of confidence, ease and comfort and to replace musical feasting with recognition of musical materials' innate values. In addition, the sophistication of highly competitive music markets and new technical devices required new degrees of perfection and accuracy in musical thought. In this context the evolution from late German Romanticism to the twelve-tone system can be traced in the work of Anton Webern who started his career with orchestral works following the example of Gustav Mahler, for instance the tone poem *Im Sommerwind* from 1905, and then moved on to the simultaneous use of traditional forms and the dissolution of tonality. His chamber music for cello and piano, *Three Little Pieces* Op. 11 and the incomplete one-movement Sonata are written in the atonal style that Webern and his teacher Arnold Schönberg applied until 1925; however, their language clearly points towards the emergence of serialism. Characteristics of Webern's language are evident in the concept of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, whereby the structure of music follows from the transformation of colours instead of pitches and rhythms. He also shows a preference for extreme dynamics involving the frequent use of *ppp*, *crescendo* and *decrescendo* stretched over single notes and for frequent application of particular instrumental techniques such as *sul ponticello* (played on the bridge) and *col legno* (strike string with the stick of the bow). The Sonata for cello and piano was only discovered in 1965; the piece is strikingly short and plays with contrasts and inversion both within its two musical parts and also in the interplay of both instruments. In contrast to the *Three Pieces* Op. 11, where sound is often reduced to a minimum and complemented by almost equal stretches of silence, the Sonata is rather expressive, sometimes amounting to violent and uncompromising outbursts on both instruments.

FAITH AND ACRIDITY:

SERGEI PROKOFIEV'S *Sarcasms* OP. 17 AND

SERGEI RACHMANINOV'S *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 1. 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 Rachmaninov had already discovered and developed their own musical styles before the dawning of the war and continued their individual paths in exile after 1918.

Prokofiev's piano music possesses characteristics such as sarcasm, textural lightness, rhythmic energy and neo-classical traits. Recourse to classical forms as in his 'Classical' Symphony allowed for simple and melodic expressions and intentionally placed the composer next to Joseph Haydn, yet a 'Haydn who had lived to our own day [and] retained his own style while accepting something of the new at the same time.' The 'new' for Prokofiev consisted in the application of parody and distortion, very much in accordance with his own nature to which he personally attributed 'whimsicality, laughter, and mocking'. The five movements of *Sarcasms* Op. 17 reflect these attributes in adamantly hammering rhythms (*i. Tempestoso*), erratic outbursts (*ii. Allegro rubato*), grim virtuosity and sudden shifts of mood (*iii. Allegro precipitato*), preference for a piercing descant of the piano paired with strict and rigid bass voices (*iv. Smanioso*), and abrupt changes between energetic violence and timid elegance (*v. Precipitosissimo*).

In contrast the short song *From the Gospel of St John* by Sergei Rachmaninov reveals strong links to sacred music that many Russian composers maintained throughout their lives despite the systematic destruction of churches under the Soviet regime. 'How much poorer we are without the sacred musical services, the Masses, the Passions, the round-the-calendar cantatas of the Protestants, the motets and sacred concerts, and vespers and so many others?', asked Stravinsky in 1959. For the young Rachmaninov visits to local churches and the enjoyment of hymns with his maternal grandmother possibly counted among the safest and deepest impressions of stability and belonging. The succession of one of Rachmaninov's major choral works, the *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* (1910), his orchestral piece *The Bells* (1913) and the short but intense song *From the Gospel of St John* from 1915 might reflect comforting recollections of the composer's adolescent years in the face of a looming disaster.

PURSUING BEAUTY AND BANALITY:
MAURICE RAVEL'S PIANO TRIO IN A MINOR AND
ERIK SATIE'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, and in particular 'Wagnerism'. Satie's piano music partially derived from Gabriel Fauré's and Emmanuel Chabrier's harmonies. As early as 1890 Satie used to spice his compositions with ironic and playful performance instructions such as '*very seriously silent*', '*slow down politely*' and '*open the head*' that in their banality dethroned composers from previously occupied positions as prophets and instructors. For Satie music was supposed to be an everyday occurrence, an activity like any other. In *Sports and divertissements*, 21 piano miniatures that represent his late style, Satie takes this stance even further and inserts commentaries throughout the music, which while describing its content demystify nineteenth-century notions of programme music. Besides ironic commentaries on sporting activities of his contemporaries the miniatures also imply a hidden mockery of nationalism and militarism.

LONGING FOR REJUVENATION:
VOCAL MUSIC BY EDWARD ELGAR

When in 1900 the British composer Edward Elgar presented his oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius* to an audience in Birmingham it provoked resistance and rejection almost as strong as Stravinsky's *Sacre du printemps* more than a decade later in Paris. It was not only the underlying religious poem by Cardinal John Henry Newman that clashed with Anglican theological doctrine but also peculiarities of Elgar's musical language that made perception and memorisation difficult for participating musicians and listeners. Fortunately the work was better performed and more enthusiastically perceived in Germany, eventually paving the way for a successive triumphant tour around the globe. In 1902, at the lower Rhenisch Music Festival in Düsseldorf, Richard Strauss, who himself was considered to be 'the greatest genius of the age' raised his glass to the 'first English progressive musician, Meister Elgar'. Elgar's own affinity with German and French Romanticism crosses his entire work; yet above everything else his music represents a new generation of English composers who despite their cosmopolitan outlooks and interest in European musical developments cared for national heritage and character. British composers would not only increasingly have recourse to ancient English masters such as Thomas Tallis, Henry Purcell and William Byrd but would also find inspiration in Britain's hegemonic natural element, water. Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony* from 1909 and Edward Elgar's *Sea Pictures* Op. 37 from 1899 are inimitable dedications to their island's natural environment.

When Edward Elgar wrote the two part-songs *Showers* and *Fountains* Op. 17 in 1914 he found himself in a state of abhorrence regarding the impending carnage. In response to the war he composed but later withdrew *A Song for Soldiers* and dedicated patriotic orchestral works, *Carillon* Op. 72 and *Polonia* Op. 76, to Belgium and Poland respectively; at the same time he voluntarily joined the local police and the reserve army in Hampstead. Elgar's *Showers* and *Fountains* in some ways connect to the often quoted optimistic British lifestyle before World War 1 that drew from the beauty of the British countryside and urban gardens. The underlying poems of Op. 71 written by the physician and poet Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) reveal a further dimension as they are concerned with rebirth and recovery, ambiguities, still sufferance and quiet solicitousness. They also use allegories between nature and human experience that are closely translated into music.

IN SEARCH OF THE NATION'S SOUL:
WORKS BY ZOLTÁN KODÁLY AND MANUEL DE FALLA

National aspirations increasingly coloured the face and shape of emerging musical languages that can certainly be understood as counterparts to German hegemony that had prevailed during the Romantic age. These languages were supposed to break away from the French-Russian-German axis and became particularly important for new players such as the United States and smaller nations such as Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Bohemia. For the composer Zoltán Kodály the search for authenticity and identity went further: he strongly criticised the detachment of an overtly academic musical elite from any natural foundations of music making and launched research into Central European folkloristic heritage even before his friend Béla Bartók. The Duo for violin and cello Op. 7 from 1914 was not played in public until the mid 1920s; it later achieved large popularity together with a comparable duo written by Ravel as rare representants of a much neglected chamber music formation. The three interconnected movements of the duo explore Hungarian folk material; for Kodály song and melody formed the basis for all music and directed his compositional style. His conviction was confirmed when he visited Britain in the 1920s and discovered the high level of singing skills based on systematic instruction in solmisation. Back home Kodály's fundamentalist musical attitude inspired the development of a universal approach to music education which was based on basic rhythms and singing; in his opinion the new method would help to unify the global community in exploration and consolidation of their musical capacities.

Without having pedagogical ambitions the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla nevertheless successfully pursued the revival and appreciation of his home country's authentic musical language. Steeped into a nationalist movement initiated by Isaac Albéniz and Enrique Granados, who were engaged with *zarzuela*, a popular form of Spanish folk opera, de Falla acquired cosmopolitan spirit and impressionistic colours in Paris where he met Debussy, Dukas and Ravel. The *Siete canciones populares españolas* outstripped any other of de Falla's successful vocal works in popularity. Written at the time of the war's outbreak the folk songs illustrate daily life in a naive and melancholic manner and apparently captured people's hopes for national recovery.

BRAVE NEW WORLD:
CHARLES IVES AND HIS VIOLIN SONATA NO. 3

The 1874 born American composer Charles Ives was not burdened with any particular musical heritage: as a son of a church musician and a band master he was surrounded with hymns, spirituals, indigenous and even Egyptian

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 1960s. 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 1914 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' time and in addition absorbs the harshness and intensity, colours and sounds of urban life.

Helene Albrecht