



Casals Quartet & Tamara Stefanovich Hungariana

Sunday 3 February 2019,
Milton Court Concert Hall

Concert 1: 11am

Concert 2: 3pm

Concert 3: 7.30pm



Casals String Quartet

Vera Martínez Mehner violin (*leader*)

Abel Tomàs violin

Jonathan Brown viola

Arnau Tomàs cello

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Gerard McBurney creative director

Amelia Kosminsky video designer

Pete Wallace video operator

Part of Barbican Presents 2018–19

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Casals Quartet & Tamara Stefanovich Hungariana

Sun 3 Feb

Milton Court Concert Hall

Concert 1 11am

Ligeti Musica ricercata I–V

György Kurtág Hommage à Mihály András:

12 Microludes, Op 13

György Kurtág Játékok – excerpts

Bartók String Quartet No 1, Op 7

Casals Quartet

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Gerard McBurney creative director

Amelia Kosminsky video designer

Concert 2 3pm

György Kurtág Six Moments musicaux, Op 44

Bartók 14 Bagatelles, Op 6

Ligeti Études – excerpts

Bartók String Quartet No 3

Casals Quartet

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Gerard McBurney creative director

Amelia Kosminsky video designer

Concert 3 7.30pm

Bartók Three Burlesques, Op 8c

György Kurtág Játékok – excerpts

Ligeti Musica ricercata VI–XI

Ligeti String Quartet No 1, 'Métamorphoses nocturnes'

Casals Quartet

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Gerard McBurney creative director

Amelia Kosminsky video designer

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Hungarian Dreams

Gerard McBurney, creative director, on the background to Hungariana

In 1881 Béla Bartók was born in a small town in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is now Romania. Part of his childhood he spent in what is now Ukraine and another in what is now Slovakia, before eventually moving to Budapest. In 1940 he left his native land for the United States. He died in New York in 1945.

In 1923 György Ligeti was born in a small town in what had recently become Romania. In 1944 he was imprisoned in a labour camp, but spent most of his student and early professional years in Budapest. In 1956, following the Hungarian Uprising and the Soviet invasion, he fled to Austria. Thereafter, his working life took him to Germany, the USA and other places, and he died in Vienna in 2006.

György Kurtág is happily still with us. He, like Bartók and Ligeti, was born in a small town in what is still Romania, in 1926. He moved to Budapest in 1946, and in the late 1950s he went to Paris, where he spent two years as a postgraduate student. Many years later, early in our new millennium, he and his wife chose to move to France once more, where they spent over a decade, before moving back to Budapest.

There's a pattern here. And it's one mirrored in the lives of a great many Hungarian artists. Take the two most famous Hungarian poets of the 20th century, both of them, in different ways, important to our three composers.

Endre Ady, the emblematic Hungarian Symbolist, was born in 1877 in a small village in what is now Romania. Between 1904 and 1911 he spent much time in Paris, where he was deeply influenced by modernist French poetry. (In 1916 Bartók wrote his wonderful *Five Songs*, Op 16 to Ady's words). He died in Budapest in 1919.

Attila József was born in Budapest in 1905. In 1925 he moved to Vienna, then the following year to Paris. In 1927 he returned to Budapest and there, a few years later, he and Bartók met. In 1937 József was killed when he stepped between the carriages of a train that suddenly moved. Some think this was suicide, others that it was an accident.

And the prose writers? The Nobel Prize-winning chronicler of the Holocaust, Imre Kertész, spent many years in Germany. The novelist and memoirist Sándor Márai emigrated to Italy in 1948 and then the USA, where he died by his own hand in San Diego in 1989.

Or the photographers, painters and film-makers? László Moholy-Nagy moved through Vienna, Berlin and London, before ending up in Chicago. Robert Capa; André Kertész; and Michael Curtiz, famously remembered as the director of *Casablanca* but one of the greatest pioneers of Hungarian cinema. So many talents!

The common threads are as follows:

The emergence of modern Hungary from the ruins of the Habsburg Empire, and its subsequent and often disastrous reshaping by wars, treaties and revolutions.

The compound catastrophe of Hungarian fascism and Hungarian communism, and the related disasters of being laid waste to by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

The unusual role of Transylvania as a cradle of Hungarian culture even after it became part of the new Romania.

The access to French culture that Transylvania enabled (Romania had a deep tradition of Francophilia).

The idea of emigration and return.

A great love of the Hungarian language.

The overwhelming impact of the Holocaust, and the creative tension in the minds of so many great artists between their Jewish and Hungarian identities.

And, right at the centre, the capital city of Budapest, whose doubly enigmatic character – Buda, one side of the river Danube, and Pest on the other – seems to have haunted every artist who ever lived there.

Over the course of these three concerts, we celebrate three great composers – Bartók, Ligeti and Kurtág – with a special but not exclusive emphasis on their earlier works.

We surround these pieces with a poetic and visual environment, complementing them as lightly as we can with scraps of prose and poetry which reflect the Hungarian world from which these composers came. We also use fragments of old photographs of Hungary – mostly by amateur photographers from around 1900 to the late 20th century – to evoke the great historical events through which Hungarians have lived, as well as focusing in on tiny and evocative details of buildings, streets, rivers, fields and villages.

We hear from the composers themselves, through their diaries, letters, reminiscences and conversations.

The writers whose words we hear include, in the order in which we meet them:

Antal Szerb (1901–45): the Jewish scholar and novelist, who was beaten to death in a concentration camp at the age of 43.

Endre Ady (1877–1919): one of the best loved and greatest of all Hungarian poets and a brilliant writer of short stories.

Hugó Veigelsberg, known as 'Ignotus' (1869–1949): scholar, critic and writer, and founder of the most important Hungarian literary magazine *Nyugat* ('West').

Attila József (1905–37): the greatest Hungarian poet between the two world wars.

Gyula Krúdy (1878–1933), novelist and journalist.

Samuel Beckett (1906–89) Irish playwright, author, theatre director and translator

Sándor Márai (1900–89), poet, novelist, memoirist and journalist.

The original Hungarian texts of poems by Ady and József have been specially recorded for these concerts by the Anglo-Hungarian writer and scholar Peter Sherwood.

Deep thanks to Peter Sherwood for guiding me through the mysteries of Hungaricana, and to Alexander Ryan for the brief but telling quotation from a letter by György Kurtág's favourite author, Samuel Beckett.

© Gerard McBurney

Amelia Kosminsky on bringing the visuals to life

When Gerard and I embarked on this project, one of the most important elements was finding the correct visual style to support the music of the day. In researching Hungarian photography through the works of photographers such as Brassai, Capa, Moholy-Nagy and Kertész, I came across this incredible archive of Fortepan, an online collection of amateur Hungarian photography from 1900 to 2000.

Using elements of real Hungarian photographs throughout the century, I collated imagery to create a dreamlike atmosphere that reflects the musical ideas of Bartók, Ligeti and Kurtág in a non-narrative way.

Being able to see Hungary through the eyes of its photographers was crucial to creating the video design for the concerts and allowed for intriguing insight into the country about which the composers were writing.

A huge thank you to the creators, contributors and donors of Fortepan for allowing us to walk through history through their documentation.

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Sun 3 Feb: Hungariana

11am: Concert 1

György Ligeti (1923–2006)

Musica ricercata (1951–3) — Nos I–V

György Kurtág (born 1926)

Hommage à Mihály András: Twelve Microludes, Op 13 (1977–8)

György Kurtág

Játékok — excerpts from Book III, Book V & Book II

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

String Quartet No 1, Op 7 (1908–9)

Casals Quartet

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Gerard McBurney creative director

Amelia Kosminsky video designer

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György Ligeti

Musica ricercata

- I Sostenuto – Misurato – Prestissimo
- II Mesto, rigido e cerimoniale
- III Allegro con spirito
- IV Tempo di valse (poco vivace – ‘à l’orgue de Barbarie’)
- V Rubato. Lamentoso

Though sceptical of Schoenberg’s serialism, Ligeti was fascinated by other kinds of algorithms, or rules, by which music could be generated. An early example can be found in his *Musica ricercata* of 1951–3, written when he was in his late twenties and teaching at the Liszt Academy in Budapest. Feeling he had exhausted the folksy, post-Bartók, post-Kodály idiom that was the *lingua franca* in Hungary at the time, he decided to go back to basics ‘to build up a new music from nothing’. Hence this ‘researched music’, a suite of piano pieces each adding one to the available store of notes, beginning with two, to end with something like a *ricercare*, or fugue, of Baroque times. Too audacious for performance in Budapest at the time, the work seemed to its composer, after his emigration to western Europe, too tame to be set before audiences who expected new music to sound like Boulez, Stockhausen or Nono – or to not sound, like Cage. He therefore kept it under wraps until 1969, when developments in new music, and in his own work, had made it more plausible. Half a century on from then, it might appear startling all over again, as well as thoroughly appealing, by virtue of its brilliance, variety and humour.

Tamara Stefanovich performs the first five pieces this morning and completes the set this evening.

I: At first this is one-note music, all on A in various registers. There is a theatrical start, and then a monotone theme is assembled over an octave ostinato. After having sped up, simplified itself and seemingly finished, the music intemperately goes on, in octaves at the top and bottom of the keyboard. The entry of a new note, D, again in an octave spread, is not so much a homecoming as a doorway leading on.

II: In what is again a miniature sound-drama, a single interval – a minor second, oddly pitched

between E sharp and F sharp – provides all the material necessary for a slip of chant, dark and threatening. Here, too, a note is held in reserve – G, adding a further minor second – to arrive halfway through, changing the locus of the threat. Stanley Kubrick made telling use of the piece in his 1999 film *Eyes Wide Shut*.

III: Now the full assembly of four notes runs all through a piece that thereby wobbles and skips around a triad in C with major and minor thirds. Not for the last time, an abstract construct ends up sounding like folk music.

IV: Four notes from a G minor scale are enough for a tipsy waltz, coming as if from a barrel organ (*orgue de Barbarie*). Almost lost, the tune recovers itself thanks to a scare from the movement’s fifth note, G sharp.

V: The minor-second chant of the second number is revisited, but now in denser harmony, derived from an octatonic scale (of alternating semitones and whole tones). Bells are evoked, and the piece comes to rest on G, with the minor chord resonating on.

György Kurtág

Hommage à Mihály András: 12 Microludes, Op 13

I – II – III – IV Presto – V Lontano, calmo, appena sentito – VI – VII – VIII Con slancio – IX – X Molto agitato – XI – XII Leggiero, con moto, dolce

Kurtág composed his second quartet in 1977–8 for the 60th birthday of a musician he revered; it takes the form of 12 ‘microludes’ playing for 10 minutes in total. These tiny movements, bringing an atmosphere or a gesture to a conclusion almost as soon as it has been set up, might be compared to scenes from a film, in which there are different characters, different situations, different locations, the quick succession of those scenes intensifying the narrative impetus. What remains longest is the fifth piece, where phrases from a folk song are heard as if from across immense distances of space and time. In the next, an F major chord keeps coming back in the violins, like a persistent light, no matter what.

György Kurtág **from *Játékok*, Book III**

12 New Microludes: 1 – 2 Agitato – 3 –
4 Labyrinthine D – 5 Tune (Hommage à
Ferenc Szabó) – 6 Shadowplay (Hommage
à György Somlyó) – 7 Hommage à András
Mihály – 8 Con slancio – 9 Obsolete A flat –
10 Vivo – 11 Hommage à JSB – 12 Hommage à
Stockhausen
Play with Infinity
Quiet Talk with the Devil
Dirge (1)
Elegy for the Left Hand
Shadowplay (3)
Silence (Hommage à Szervánszky)
Dirge (2)
Half Asleep (Hommage à Christian Wolff)

from *Játékok*, Book V

A Voice in the Distance (for Alfred Schlee's 80th
birthday)

from *Játékok*, Book II

12 Microludes (Hommage à Kadosa): 1–9 untitled
– 10 'Messzenező szép konyokló' – 11 Hommage à
André Hajdu – 12 Hommage à Nancy Sinatra

In his first period of maturity, Kurtág spent 14 years writing just nine works, nearly all of them short and for small forces. Then, suddenly, he became what he could never have expected to be: prolific. The spark was an invitation in 1973 to compose some children's piano pieces. He fulfilled the commission, but the motor went on turning. By 1979 he had written enough for four volumes, since which time he has never stopped, so that there are now several hundred of these *Játékok* (which translates as 'Games' or 'Play Material').

The original purpose of exercising infant fingers was outstripped as the composer's attention shifted from the teaching studio to the concert hall, and in particular to creating repertoire for his wife Márta and himself. Many of the pieces suggest images, from a flower to infinity by way of human gestures and relationships. A lot are homages: portraits of friends or evocations of other composers. Among those present here are two of Kurtág's teachers, Ferenc Szabó and Pál Kadosa; the poet György Somlyó; two important protectors of an older generation, András Mihály and Endre Szervánszky; and a younger colleague who emigrated to Paris and eventually Jerusalem, André Hajdu.

Altogether, in a multitude of fragments, the pieces reflect a whole musical universe. They

gave Kurtág not only clues toward larger compositions – including the quartet to be heard this afternoon – but also a spirit he has kept with him, of composition as playing games with deadly seriousness.

This first Kurtág group begins with a set of microludes the composer placed at the end of his Third Book, ranging in duration from a few seconds (a wobble and a skid for JS Bach) to a couple of minutes (the shadowplay of soft sounds and resonances). First off is an example of a Kurtág type, the insistent question that elicits several responses, none of them satisfactory. Agitation in the next piece is caused by rising scales. Ferenc Szabó's tune is almost buried in bell sounds, while András Mihály receives cracked bells, insistence and wisps of a melody. 'Con slancio' means 'With momentum' – jumpy momentum here.

In 'Play with Infinity', Kurtág scans the keyboard and the sky. The devil lurks in the bass for the conversation that follows, after which come a broken-chorale dirge and a left-hand elegy that is again one of the longer pieces. Another shadowplay has one hand shadowing the other. Szervánszky's silence (a wartime hero in saving Jews, he was a composer who wrote little in his later years) goes on to a dirge of worry and bells inscribed to Ilona Ligeti, physician and mother of the composer, and then to Christian Wolff's gentle resonances, reaching home.

Kurtág wrote 'A Voice in the Distance' – or 'Aus der Ferne' (From the Distance), to give it its original German title – for his Austrian publisher. The selection then ends with the set of microludes that closes the second volume of *Játékok*. Most are untitled, but not the last three. No 10 carries a quote from Béla Balázs's *Bluebeard's Castle* (set by Bartók) suggestive of leaning on a window sill to look out into the distance; No 11 might be conveying the same posture softly and brightly; and No 12 recalls a hit of 1966, 'These Boots are Made for Walkin'".

Béla Bartók **String Quartet No 1, Op 7**

1 Lento
2 Allegretto
3 Allegro vivace

Bartók's instrument was the piano, and it was with pieces for the piano that he started out as a composer. When, however, he began to take his

composing more seriously, in his mid-teens, he extended his range to the violin sonata, chamber music for strings and piano and the string quartet, of which he wrote three between the ages of 15 and 17. There was then a gap of a decade before the first quartet he was to publish, which he completed in January 1909.

Soon afterwards, a young violinist named Imre Waldbauer, just turning 17, formed a quartet to play the work and also a quartet by Kodály. The second violin and viola he conscripted were also teenagers, with Jenő Kerpely, the cellist, the doyen of the group at 23. After rehearsing the two works for a year, and committing them to memory, they introduced them at two portrait concerts in March 1910. (Waldbauer and Kerpely were to accompany Bartók throughout his 30-year quartet journey, and to give the first performances of its next three stages.)

Bartók's intention for the piece was probably what it had been with his quartets of before: to prove himself by the lights of the great tradition centred on nearby Vienna, yet to remain distinctively separate, Hungarian. At the same time, this First Quartet was part of the musical story that came out of his breaking romance with Stefi Geyer, for whom, and around whom, he was simultaneously composing his First Violin Concerto. He began both the concerto and the quartet in 1907, passionately in love; by the time the quartet was finished, it was all over. The arpeggiated D major seventh chord that had been Stefi's motif in the luminous first movement of the concerto was now, in the equivalent movement of the quartet, reconfigured as a pair of falling sixths, in F minor.

These sixths open a duo for the violins that soon departs from strict canon, continuing as a pair of straying, unsupported lines – a sound unprecedented in the quartet literature and perhaps expressive of two people who, drifting apart, feel themselves adrift. The duo also sets out the essentially polyphonic terms of this movement, which indicates the importance to the young Bartók of Reger and the Schoenberg of *Verklärte Nacht*. When the viola and cello enter, it is to repeat the opening down an octave before joining the others in four-part interplay. There is a middle section, with the viola straining at falling semitones and then the violins and viola making a rustle of parallel triads over a cello line, followed

by an apotheosis of the beginning up an octave, at once reprise and preparation.

What it prepares is a twilight Allegretto in sonata form, dancing and spectral. The faster tempo is gained through an introduction for the quartet in duos, and defined by the second violin in affirming the main motif – a semitonal fall followed by a fifth. Tonality is compromised here not only by chromaticism but also by the presence of the whole-tone scale, perhaps conceding (though so independently) the continuing influence of Debussy.

The quartet could have ended here, as a slow-fast diptych, comparable thereby with Stefi's concerto. However, there was something else on Bartók's mind at this time. The summer of the quartet's first sketches was also the summer of his first visit to Transylvania, and his discovery there of tunes that, being pentatonic, he believed to be ancient, perhaps predating the great Magyar migration of 1,000 years before.

In form the finale is again a sort of sonata, prefaced by an introduction made up of chordal summonses separating recitatives from the cello and first violin. The movement is also galvanised by a spirit of variation so intense as sometimes to reach parody. Much of the development section, for instance, is a fugato in which the abrupt principal theme (tweaked and extended from that of the preceding movement) is teased into a playful *grazioso*, and even before this passage the theme has been subsumed into opera, in G sharp minor. Nor is the driving second subject (a semitonal fall heard three times, followed by a drop of a minor third) immune, for it can become an impassioned *adagio* lament or be inverted.

Even so, the movement is principally characterised by ostinatos, fast pulsations and vigorous syncopations, bringing the quartet into the hard-edged, fiercely dynamic territory that Bartók was to make his own, and leading to a blaze of tonal certitude, on A, achieved without the good offices of traditional tonality. The movement as a whole makes a decisive homecoming, and all the more so for coming after two of a suspended, improvisatory kind.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths

Sun 3 Feb: Hungariana

3pm: Concert 2

György Kurtág (born 1926)

Six Moments musicaux, Op 44 (2005)

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

14 Bagatelles, Op 6 (1908)

György Ligeti (1923–2006)

Études (1985–95) — excerpts

Béla Bartók

String Quartet No 3 (1927)

Casals Quartet

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Gerard McBurney creative director

Amelia Kosminsky video designer

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György Kurtág

Six Moments musicaux, Op 44

- 1 Invocatio
- 2 Footfalls
- 3 Capriccio
- 4 In memoriam György Sebők
- 5 ... rappel des oiseaux ...
- 6 Les adieux—in Janáček's Manier

Kurtág wrote this, his fourth quartet, in 2005, and gave it an aptly Schubertian title, for these are distinct musical moments, even if they combine to make a whole form, a whole drama, alternating between speed and slowness.

The opening movement is mostly driving, impassioned and loud, but at its heart lie a chromatic melody, unfolded by the instruments in turn, all playing *pianissimo*, and a chorale, given the nasal sound of bow strokes close to the fingerboard.

'Footfalls', the first slow movement, takes its title from one of Samuel Beckett's short late plays, to which the composer adds an epigraph from the Hungarian poet Endre Ady: '... as though someone were coming...'

Next, a game with quickfire responses and ostinatos, the first part being repeated; this is followed by a memorial to the Hungarian pianist and teacher György Sebők (1922–99). The piano original of this piece was one of Kurtág's *Játékok*, as was that of the finale.

Then comes a birdsong movement, subtitled 'study in harmonics' and paying unspoken homage to Messiaen, followed by a farewell carrying thoughts of Beethoven (his 'Les adieux' Sonata, Op 81a) as well as Janáček, yet speaking powerfully and movingly with its own voice.

Béla Bartók

14 Bagatelles, Op 6

- 1 Molto sostenuto
- 2 Allegro giocoso
- 3 Andante
- 4 Grave
- 5 Vivo
- 6 Lento
- 7 Allegretto molto capriccioso
- 8 Andante sostenuto
- 9 Allegretto grazioso
- 10 Allegro

- 11 Allegretto molto rubato
- 12 Rubato – Poco più mosso
- 13 (Elle est morte ...): Lento funebre
- 14 Valse (ma mie qui danse): Presto

In his late twenties Bartók enjoyed a creative surge that produced several orchestral scores, his First String Quartet and a lot of piano music. Financial stability may have helped: in 1907 he joined the staff at his alma mater, the Liszt Academy in Budapest, as a piano professor. But he also had a lot of new musical impulses in his mind that demanded attention. In the year of his academy appointment he made the acquaintance of Debussy's piano music, through scores his friend Zoltán Kodály brought back from Paris. The year before he and Kodály had gone on their first tour collecting folk songs.

Correspondingly, some of the bagatelles lean very much toward ancient folk music, whereas others suggest a composer absolutely up to date, not only with Debussy but also with Schoenberg. The latter was opening the door into atonality at just this time, and in some of these bagatelles Bartók was close behind him. A piece such as the eighth of the set, highly chromatic, might seem far removed from the liveliness of the fifth, based on a tune Bartók transcribed in Slovakia (and the fourth, too, is based on a folk song).

However, there was a certain accord between what Bartók heard in remote villages and what he encountered on the pages of his contemporaries. Both were leading him away from traditional tonality and rhythm, and so similar harmonies and melodic motifs can sound folkish in one piece and abstract in another. From both his sources, too, Bartók had learned to achieve strength and immediacy through compactness.

At the same time, despite all the influences aswirl in them, these pieces are completely personal in style, with their traits of insistence and intensity. They seem to be personal, too, in subject matter, at least as the cycle nears its end. The fateful 13th piece, parenthetically entitled 'Elle est morte ...' (She is dead), is a lament prompted by the ending of Bartók's affair with the violinist Stefi Geyer, and the finale is based on a melodic gesture he associated with Stefi – a gesture taken into a nightmare presto, as if the young composer were being visited by his ex-lover's ghost.

György Ligeti

Études

No 2 Cordes à vide
No 8 Fém
No 11 En suspens
No 3 Touches bloquées
No 5 Arc-en-ciel
No 15 White on White
No 10 Der Zaublerlehrling

Having begun with a book of six piano études, published in 1985, Ligeti found it impossible to stop adding more: the fantastic machinery of his creative mentality had discovered a perfect medium in the fantastic machinery of the piano. So much feeds into these pieces: all his earlier experience of composing and of Central European folk music, the surviving diatonic light in Debussy, and newer enthusiasms that included fractal patterning (whereby similar images are multiplied on one another infinitely), African music and the complex cross-rhythms of Conlon Nancarrow, all helping Ligeti to create the illusion of several simultaneous layers moving at different speeds.

‘Cordes à vide’ (Open Strings): The studies in the First Book share certain basic features: generative construction from simple elements; imprints from folk music; harmony and metre in states of bewilderment or veiling. This piece is a study in fifths, hence the title’s reference to the tuning of string instruments.

‘Fém’ (Metal): The piece is a hocket in even rhythmic values, alternately loud and soft, locked into close registral spaces, and moving from fifths and triads to more complex chords: the sound is harsh, clangorous, indeed metallic, and indeed also luminous. (In Hungarian *fém* means ‘metal’ and *fény* is ‘light’.) In a quiet coda, some of the territory is gone over again at one-third of the original speed.

‘En suspens’ (Suspended): This *Étude* sounds like an attempt to recall Debussy’s ‘Clair de lune’. The hands have non-overlapping sets of keys: five black plus one white, and the six white remaining. Hence the modal colourings, and the sense of distantly remembered folk song.

‘Touches bloquées’ (Blocked Keys): The right hand’s notes are interrupted when it tries to strike a key the left is holding down and thereby blocking, so that its even rhythm is hobbled. In a typical Ligetian tactic, the music descends into the bass and then reappears in the high treble –

strikingly transformed, as it turns out, though the right hand’s halting race is then briefly resumed.

‘Arc-en-ciel’ (Rainbow): Fresh-coloured harmonies hang on long arcs, the gentle figures jostling between the hands to keep the music afloat despite the pressure to descend caused by chromatic scales. The hands come apart and rejoin, and the piece vanishes into the infinite blue above the range of the piano’s keyboard.

‘White on White’: A slow chorale-canon proceeds entirely on the white keys in the treble register, though out of these restricted means come harmonic inclinations that are crooked and unstable: progressions (in this case triads are rare, and chords are generally unrepeated) often seem to be pulling in two or more directions at the same time. The piece then turns into a typical play of asymmetrical melody on asymmetrical grouped running quavers, but still only on the white notes until very near the end.

‘Der Zaublerlehrling’: Based on the Goethe story musically retold in Dukas’s *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* (and musically enacted by Mickey Mouse in the Disney film *Fantasia*), this is a scherzo in which a simple ostinato is constantly on the move rhythmically and harmonically, turning at the main crisis point into an A flat Phrygian scale.

Béla Bartók

String Quartet No 3

1 Prima parte: Moderato –
2 Seconda parte: Allegro –
3 Recapitulazione della prima parte: Moderato –
4 Coda: Allegro molto

Completed in September 1927, the Third is Bartók’s shortest quartet and also his most intemperate and formally complex. Percussive sounds – notes played *col legno*, *martellato* attacks on the tailpiece, emphatic dissonant chords – suggest an effort to bring the quartet into the world of the piano, on which the composer had recently been concentrating. Moreover, the harmony is astringent and restless, and motivic ideas are often immediately countered by imitations and inversions, presented in canon. The Waldbauer–Kerpely Quartet took time to prepare the work before giving its first performance, on 19 February 1929.

The slow–fast pattern that Bartók had supplemented in his First Quartet he here embraced – twice over. What begins the

work is a sequence of meditations on small cells, of which the most important has a rising fourth followed by a falling minor third. Out of this comes a quick sonata movement, whose development section finds issue in a fugato passage, after which a clear thematic recapitulation moves on into a coda.

What ensues in the recapitulation of the first part is more a revisiting of certain ideas from the

introduction in a new context. There follows in the final section a similar altered return to the themes, the harmony and the tempo of the second part, ending ambiguously. As at the close of the First Quartet, there is a pile-up of fifths, which could be regarded as a resolution of the opening piled semitones. However, the chord is still strongly dissonant, besides being off-centre in terms of string instruments' tuning, and may suggest music that has been cut off almost against its will.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths



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Sun 3 Feb: Hungariana

7.30pm: Concert 3

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Three Burlesques, Op 8c (1908–11)

György Kurtág (born 1926)

Játékok – excerpts from Book I, Book II, Book III,
Book V, Book VI & uncollected

György Ligeti (1923–2006)

Musica ricercata (1951–3) – Nos VI–XI

György Ligeti

String Quartet No 1, 'Métamorphoses nocturnes'
(1953–4)

Casals Quartet

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Gerard McBurney creative director

Amelia Kosminsky video designer

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Béla Bartók **Three Burlesques, Op 8c**

- 1 Quarrel: Presto
- 2 A Bit Drunk: Allegretto
- 3 Molto vivo, capriccioso

The first of Bartók's *Three Burlesques* dates from 1908, the same year as the *Bagatelles*, Op 6, into which it might have fitted. Its title relates to how the hands rush after each other in imitation, to overlaps of triple and quadruple time, and to the salting of octaves with biting major seconds. On the larger scale, it is an argument on a six-note idea made up of semitones and a tritone – a highly chromatic subject, therefore, resolving into C like the 10th Bagatelle.

'A Bit Drunk' was written in 1910 and might be an insight into the realities of folk-song collecting. Its theme is a folk-type tune played at first in triads, but 'in an unsteady rhythm', Bartók notes, and with the hiccups of dissonant grace notes.

Ostinatos figure in the last piece, from May 1911. The armoury scene from *Bluebeard's Castle*, which Bartók was composing at this time, is reconceived humorously.

György Kurtág **from Játékok, Book I**

- Flowers we are, frail flowers ... (versions 1a and 1b)
- Little Chorale (1)
- Hommage à Bartók
- Detecting Chords (Hommage à István Máriássy)
- Boisterous Csárdás
- Little Chorale (2)
- Hommage à Ligeti
- Beating (3 tones, 3 rhythmic patterns)

from Játékok, Book II

- Quarrelling (4)
- Play with Overtones (3)
- Forte-Piano
- Adoration, adoration, accursed desolation ...
- Devil's Jump
- Dialogue
- Antiphony in F sharp

from Játékok, Book III

- Tumble Bunny
- Stubbunny

from Játékok, Book V

- Fanfares
- Dialogue for the 70th Birthday of András Mihály (or: How can the same 4 sounds be answered with only 3?)

from Játékok, Book VI

- For Dóra Antal's Birthday
- A Hungarian Lesson for Foreigners
- Birthday Elegy for Judit – for the second finger of her left hand (Souvenir de Kuhmo)
- Doina

from Játékok: uncollected

- For Márta Kurtág's 90th Birthday

Close to the beginning of his piano compendium Kurtág placed two variations on a strand of melody from his major work of the 1960s, *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza*. There are many more versions in this volume and later. Here, though, we go on to two little chorales of bell chords, a snap of dance for Bartók, a piece in which fingers are progressively released so that complex chords release simpler resonances (István Máriássy was a distinguished music editor), a sequence of clouds for Ligeti, and 'Beating', which, in terms of dumb abruptness, beats the 'Boisterous Csárdás' that went earlier.

From the Second Book, 'Quarrelling (4)' is a benign dispute, followed by a song of resonances – a prime example of playfulness becoming intense, even sinister – and an elemental study in soft (long) and loud (short). In the ensuing folk-song sketch the piano discovers its inner cimbalom, after which the Devil, heard from this morning quietly, jumps with a tight clangour. 'Dialogue' is a title that could fit many of these pieces, for how they speak, wordlessly; 'Antiphony in F sharp', of course, is a little dialogue of a particular kind.

Of two cunicular pieces from Book III, 'Tumble Bunny' trips over scales in suggesting a children's game of rolling about on the ground, while 'Stubbunny' (i.e. Stubborn Bunny) is one of the composer's many tiny but firm refusals. From Book V, the 'Fanfares' come from cracked trumpets, somewhat Stravinskian, to be followed by another tribute to András Mihály.

Kurtág honoured Dóra Antal, a music producer who served his music faithfully, with a little fantasy on a chant-like motif at the start of his Sixth Book, whose later numbers include a brief language

lesson, a 'birthday elegy' for the composer's 17-year-old granddaughter and a *doina* (Romanian folk song), with further cimbalom resonances, for his pupil Judit Frigyesi, currently a music scholar in Israel.

The last piece is one of several Kurtág has written for his wife Márta, performing partner and ally in everything, this one occasioned by her 90th birthday on 1 October 2017.

György Ligeti *Musica ricercata*

- VI Allegro molto capriccioso
- VII Cantabile, molto legato
- VIII Vivace. Energico
- IX (Béla Bartók in memoriam) Adagio. Mesto – Allegro maestoso
- X Vivace. Capriccioso
- XI (Omaggio a Girolamo Frescobaldi) Andante misurato e tranquillo

Begun in the first concert of the day, this sequence is now completed.

VI: The presence now of seven notes makes possible a complete diatonic scale, but one equivocating between modal varieties of A major and E, with a corresponding brightness and folk flavour.

VII: Again the music is clearly but ambiguously diatonic. Against an ostinato cloud in the left hand, the right picks out a tune, once more folk-like, that could be in C minor or G minor. (Four decades later this tune was to reappear in the composer's Violin Concerto.) Halfway through, the theme moves up an octave and is joined by a canonic voice a fifth below, which is where the eighth note comes in. Shifts lead to a dissolve.

VIII: A Bartókian rampage is delicately invaded by the tune from the preceding piece, but persists.

IX: Regular tolling at the bottom of the piano, with minor-third swings above, soon gives way to bells of a different colour, flights of panic and a long coda. The death of Bartók, with whom Ligeti had hoped to study, was only a few years in the past.

X: With 11 notes now to hand, simple tunes can be heavily chromatic or dissonated, in another compact Ligetian comedy.

XI: At four minutes, this is much the longest piece and presents a 12-note theme, which it takes round a circle and more of rising fifths while also melting it into the chromatic scales of which it is largely composed. Maintaining itself against breakdown, the movement says something about Ligeti's whole musical project. In addressing one of the first great masters of the fugue, it also says something about his consciousness of tradition, especially contrapuntal tradition.

György Ligeti *String Quartet No 1, 'Métamorphoses nocturnes'*

Allegro grazioso – Vivace, capriccioso – A tempo – Adagio, mesto – Presto–Prestissimo – Molto sostenuto–Andante tranquillo – Più mosso – Tempo di valse, moderato, con eleganza, un poco capriccioso – Subito prestissimo – Subito: molto sostenuto – Allegretto, un poco gioviale – Allarg. Poco più mosso – Subito allegro con moto, string. poco a poco sin al prestissimo – Prestissimo – Allegro comodo, gioviale – Sostenuto, accelerando–Ad libitum, senza misura – Lento

When Ligeti left Hungary in 1956, after Russian domination had been restored, he took this quartet with him, and secured a performance in Vienna a year and a half later. The work had been too challenging for presentation back home, where a Stalinist aesthetic ruled. For the composer, however, who by the time of its premiere had gained experience of electronic music, it was not challenging enough. Though he implicitly legitimised it by calling his next quartet 'No 2', he did not encourage further performances, and the quartet was not recorded until 1976. By then changes in his way of working – including, soon, a renewed enthusiasm for folk music – were beginning to make his *Métamorphoses nocturnes* less distant. And, indeed, this 'prehistoric' work (the composer's own term) is already fully Ligetian in its busy polyphony, its abundance of new colours and its dissatisfaction with received information, even – or especially – the information it was so skilfully incorporating from Hungarian sources, rustic and learned.

Ligeti was ably proceeding from Bartók (whose Sixth Quartet was barely more than a decade old), and achieving a continuous concatenation of episodes – atmospheric, macabre, dancing, humorous – threaded through with references to a motif that magically first emerges, in the form G–A–G sharp–A sharp, as a variation on parallel

chromatic scales. This theme is then bundled away to make room for the first variation in a continuous and diverse sequence, in which the four notes are reshaped in various ways. They can become a distinctly Hungarian lament, an intensive fugato, a moment of night-time stillness, a grotesque waltz, a dashing folk dance, and so on. In the Prestissimo towards the close, their intervals are progressively

expanded and contracted in a move from oscillation to more jagged contours and back again. There are also the first signs of a concern with string harmonics. Even when still in Budapest, however, the young composer may not have been satisfied. The last trailing statements of the main motif come from instruments that, after a tipsy farewell party, are already moving on.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths



About the performers

Igor Côté



Casals Quartet

Vera Martínez Mehner violin (leader)

Abel Tomàs violin

Jonathan Brown viola

Arnau Tomàs cello

The Casals Quartet was founded in 1997 at the Escuela Reina Sofía in Madrid. It celebrated its 20th-anniversary season with the launch of an especially ambitious multi-year project: a six-concert series of the complete Beethoven quartets, accompanied by six newly commissioned works, performed in cities throughout Europe, Asia and Latin America. Highlights of coming seasons include cycles of the late Mozart quartets, as well as the current 'Hungariana' project focusing on the music of Bartók, Ligeti and Kurtág.

Since winning first prizes at the London and Brahms–Hamburg competitions, the quartet has been a regular guest at the world's most prestigious concert halls, including Carnegie Hall, the Cologne Philharmonie, Cité de la Musique in Paris, Schubertiade in Schwarzenberg and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, among many others.

The quartet has compiled a substantial discography, including 12 discs for Harmonia Mundi which range from Spanish composers

Arriaga and Toldrà via cornerstones of the repertoire such as Mozart, Haydn, Schubert and Brahms, through to Debussy, Ravel and Zemlinsky; the ensemble has also released a live Blue-Ray recording of the complete Schubert quartets for Neu Records. Last year it released the first of a three-volume recording of the Beethoven quartets to great critical acclaim; the second will be released in 2019 and the final instalment in 2020, to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth.

An award from the Borletti–Buitoni Trust enabled the quartet to begin a collection of matching Baroque and Classical period bows which it uses for works from Purcell through to Schubert, refining its ability to distinguish between diverse musical styles. In addition, the quartet has been profoundly influenced by its work with living composers, especially György Kurtág, and has given the world premiere of quartets written by leading Spanish composers, including a new concerto for string quartet and orchestra by Francisco Coll, premiered with the Orquesta Nacional de España.

In recognition of its unique contributions to cultural life within Catalonia and throughout Spain,

the members of the Casals Quartet have been acknowledged as cultural ambassadors by the Generalitat of Catalonia and the Institut Ramon Llull, as well as Spain's Ministerio de Cultura. Past awards include the Premio Nacional de Música, the Premi Nacional de Cultura de Catalunya and the Premi Ciutat Barcelona. The quartet performs yearly on the extraordinary collection of decorated Stradivarius instruments in the Royal Palace in Madrid, where it will be quartet-in-residence in 2020.

In addition to giving much sought-after masterclasses, the ensemble is quartet-in-residence at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya in Barcelona, where all four members live.



Marco Borggreve

Tamara Stefanovich

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Known for captivating interpretations of a wide repertoire, Tamara Stefanovich performs at the world's major concert venues, including the Berlin Philharmonie, Suntory Hall, Tokyo, and London's Royal Albert and Wigmore Halls. She appears at international festivals such as La Roque d'Anthéron, Salzburg, Styriarte Graz and Beethovenfest Bonn. She has worked with leading orchestras, including the Cleveland Orchestra, the Bamberg, Bavarian Radio, Chicago and London Symphony orchestras, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and Swedish Chamber Orchestra.

This season she made her debut with the hr-Sinfonieorchester under Jonathan Stockhammer, giving the world premiere of Zeynep Gedizlioglu's new piano concerto. She returns to Stavanger Symphony Orchestra under Christian Eggen and the Danish National Symphony Orchestra under Michael Schønwandt for performances of Hans Abrahamsen's *Left, alone*. Together with the Askol|Schönberg Ensemble she celebrated Reinbert de Leeuw's 80th birthday. At the start of the season she joined forces with Pierre-Laurent Aimard and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra for performances of Zimmermann's *Dialogue* at the Lucerne Festival and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. The duo have also undertaken an extensive tour of the USA and will perform Stockhausen's *Mantra* at Norway's Ultima Festival Norway, Musikfest Berlin and the Southbank Centre. Tamara Stefanovich also performs at the Pharos Music Festival, Brucknerhaus Linz, SWR Mainz, Auditori Barcelona and here at the Barbican.

Recent highlights have included performances with the Bavarian Radio, MDR Leipzig and WDR Cologne Symphony orchestras, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo. She also undertook an extensive and highly acclaimed recital tour of the USA to mark the 90th birthday of Pierre Boulez.

She has collaborated with conductors such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Jurowski, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Susanna Mälkki, as well as leading composers including Pierre Boulez, Peter Eötvös, Hans Abrahamsen and György Kurtág. She regularly leads educational projects here at the Barbican Centre, Cologne Philharmonie and at Klavier-Festival Ruhr.

Tamara Stefanovich's discography includes the Grammy-nominated recording of Bartók's Concerto for Two Pianos, Percussion and Orchestra with Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Pierre Boulez and the London Symphony Orchestra for DG. She has also recorded for the AVI and Harmonia Mundi. Recent recordings include Hans Abrahamsen's Piano Concerto and 10 piano studies with the WDR Cologne Symphony

Orchestra (Winter & Winter) and Kurtág's *Quasi una fantasia* and Double Concerto with the Asko|Schönberg Ensemble and Reinbert de Leeuw (ECM).



Gerard McBurney

Gerard McBurney creative director

Gerard McBurney is a composer, writer and broadcaster, with a specialist interest in Russian and Soviet music and culture.

For two years in the mid-1980s he was a graduate student at the Moscow Conservatoire, and during that time the conductor Gennady Rozhdestvensky asked him to make a performing orchestration of fragments from Shostakovich's forgotten 1931 music-hall entertainment *Hypothetically Murdered*, Op 31. This led to encouragement from Irina Antonovna Shostakovich, the composer's widow, to make further arrangements and reconstructions, including a dance-band version of the 1950s musical comedy *Moscow, Cheryomushki*, Op 105; a performing score of the lost *Jazz Suite No 2* for big band from 1938; and most recently an orchestration of the Prologue to the uncompleted 1932 satirical opera *Orango*. This last was first performed and then recorded by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, as well as being given at the 2015 BBC Proms.

His own music sometimes reflects Russian interests, with *White Nights* (1992), after Dostoevsky and Mussorgsky, for the choreographer Kim Brandstrup and the English National Ballet; *Out of a house walked a man* (1994), inspired by the life and works of the Leningrad Absurdist Daniil Kharms, for his brother, the director Simon McBurney, and the National Theatre; and another Kharms setting, *Letter to Paradise*, for voice and orchestra, for the 1998 Proms.

Recent pieces include *Sweet Rose* (2012), to a recently rediscovered lyric by the Scots poet William Dunbar; and a piano cycle, *Cherry Cottage* (2013), memorialising family connections to Stockbridge, Massachusetts. In 2014, The Sage Gateshead released *The Little Nut Tree*, a CD of traditional British nursery rhymes in arrangements designed to interest small children in the instruments of the orchestra.

From 2006 to 2016 Gerard McBurney was Creative Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's innovative series 'Beyond the Score', creating 30 shows, each about a different composer. His recent celebration of the life and work of Pierre Boulez, *A Pierre Dream*, designed by the architect Frank Gehry, was first staged in Chicago in November 2014 and then at the Ojai, Holland and Aldeburgh festivals. In 2015 he curated a Shostakovich Day here at Milton Court Concert Hall, followed, in 2017, by an exploration of the complete Scriabin piano sonatas with Peter Donohoe.



Amelia Kosminsky

Amelia Kosminsky video designer

Amelia Kosminsky is a visual artist studying as a mature student in her final year on the Video Design for Live Performance course at Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Her previous work for Guildhall School includes *Light Odyssey* at the Winter Gardens for LightPool and *Waddesdon Imaginarium* for Waddesdon Manor.

Prior to her studies at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, she worked on *Lumiere Durham*, *Lumiere London* and Antony Gormley's Fourth Plinth commission *One & Other* for the Mayor of London.