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Musical Klimt: Vienna comes to Pärnu in Erkki-Sven Tüür's chamber gala

By Mark Pullinger, 20 July 2019

Asked to curate a festival concert, some composers could be forgiven for programming one of their own works. Not Erkki-Sven Tüür. Putting together this evening's chamber recital, Tüür's starting point was [Korngold's](#) luscious String Sextet, having heard it in Heimbach a few years ago. Composed in 1916, it's in true *fin de siècle* Viennese style –

a far cry from the terse Berg and Webern works from three years earlier that Tüür chose to open his programme. Sibelius offered an unlikely Viennese connection with a chamber version of *En Saga*, composed whilst studying in Vienna in the early 1890s.



Florian Donderer leads Korngold's String Sextet

© Kaupo Kikkas

Alban Berg and Anton Webern joined Arnold Schoenberg in the gradual shift away from tonality in the early decades of the 20th century. Opening a recital with Berg's *Four Pieces* for clarinet and piano and Webern's *Six Bagatelles* for string quartet is a calculated gamble – ten acerbic *hors d'oeuvres* swallowed down in the time it takes to ask 'Where have all the canapés gone?' and which can leave little aftertaste. Matt Hunt wove his way through Berg's knotty miniatures with gnarly intensity and fierce flutter-tonguing, full of terrific dynamic variation. Webern's *Bagatelles* befit the title: fragmentary wisps which flit and flicker, as fleeting as idle thoughts. Only one of the half dozen lasts over a minute. The string quartet assembled here played them with all the delicacy required, as if posing questions or riddles that are unanswerable.



Rie Koyama (bassoon) and Matt Hunt (clarinet) play Ligeti

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György Ligeti's *Bagatelles* are more readily understood, earthy utterances peppered with wit. The Hungarian fled to Vienna in 1956, but these six nuggets for wind quintet – taken from his cycle for piano, *Musica ricercata* – were arranged in 1953. The five players clearly relished the pungent flavours – particularly bassoonist Rie Koyama – and there was no shortage of musical chuckles. Oboist Riivo Kallasmaa, weaving his body like a snake charmer at one point, offered plangent tone, while flautist Michel Moragues swiftly swapped to piccolo at one point to deliver piercing cackles. Björn Olsson delivered the French horn's Gershwin sign-off with a tongue-in-cheek smile.

Sibelius' *En Saga* didn't quite come off. The work's Viennese origins aren't entirely

clear. It seems the composer originally intended it as either a septet or octet before it then transformed into an orchestral tone poem in 1893, revised – and tightened up – in 1902. Nothing remains of the chamber version of the score, but in 2003 Gregory Barrett restored the first version for septet – flute, clarinet, string quartet and double bass – which Tüür programmed here. Whilst it was interesting to hear, it didn't convince. One inevitably misses certain colours (an oboe in particular) and with seemingly none of the players willing to take the lead, the work's energy sagged in the middle. A conductor – even for a septet – was needed to pull this off.



Andres Kaljuste (viola) and Theodor Sink (cello) play Korngold

© Kaupo Kikkas



Korngold's *String Sextet in D major* filled the second half of the programme, and the

hall was immediately awash with a Klimtian glow, led by Florian Donderer's golden tone, Andres Kaljuste's buttery viola and Georgi Anichenko's silky cello. The *Adagio* was like a sigh for a lost world – or a world about to be lost – while the Intermezzo offered veiled glimpses of Viennese ballrooms. The *Presto* finale was energetically dispatched, vigorous yet playful, scampering to its upbeat close.

Mark's press trip to Estonia was funded by Red House Productions



“fragmentary wisps which flit and flicker, as fleeting as idle thoughts”



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Reviewed at Pärnu Concert Hall, Pärnu on 19 July 2019

PROGRAMME

Berg, Four pieces for clarinet and piano, Op.5

Webern, 6 Bagatelles for string quartet, Op.9

Ligeti, Sechs Bagatellen (Six Bagatelles for wind quintet)

Sibelius, En Saga, a symphonic poem for orchestra, Op.9 (arr. septet)

Korngold, String Sextet in D major, Op.10

PERFORMERS

Florian Donderer, *Violin*

Artur Podlyesniy, *Violin*

Adela-Maria Bratu, *Violin*

Robert Traksmann, *Violin*

Miina Järvi, *Violin*

Martin Jarvis, *Violin*

Andres Kaljuste, *Viola*

Madis Järvi, *Viola*

Mari Adachi, *Viola*

Georgi Anichenko, *Cello*

Theodor Sink, *Cello*

Marius Järvi, *Cello*

Johannes Välja, *Cello*

Regina Udod, *Double Bass*

Michel Moragues, *Flute*

Maarika Järvi, *Flute*

Matt Hunt, *Clarinet*

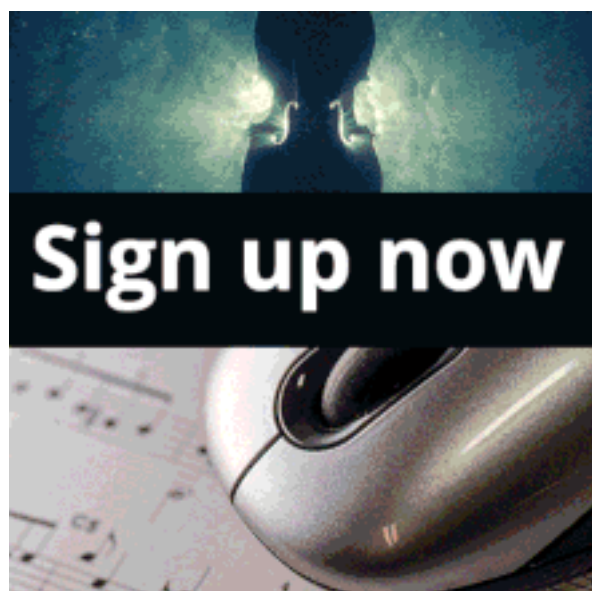
Signe Sõmer, *Clarinet*

Riivo Kallasmaa, *Oboe*

Björn Olsson, *French horn*

Rie Koyama, *Bassoon*

Maksim Stsura, *Piano*



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An auspicious start to the Pavel Haas Quartet's Birmingham residency

Peter Marks, 26th February

The Czech Pavel Haas Quartet bring their distinctive sound and selfless musicianship to Birmingham, in the first of three concerts featuring Matthew Hunt in Brahms's Clarinet Quintet alongside twentieth century quartets.



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Thomas Adès and friends shine at Milton Court

Paul Kilbey, 7th November

Despite the frequency with which the two composers are compared, Thomas Adès' music seldom sounds very much like that of Benjamin Britten. But Adès has an uncanny knack of performing Britten's music in such a way that it resembles his own.



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Three Pieces from 1918 at the Cheltenham Music Festival

Alexandra Hamilton-Ayres, 16th July

Red, white and blue bunting, with matching lighting, adorned the balconies of Cheltenham Town Hall, setting a patriotic scene for a concert of music from the year that World War I ended. Television presenter Julia Somerville opened the evening sat at a vintage newsdesk with her own careful research, for which she can be highly commended.



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Back to 1915: Kraggerud, Isserlis and more at the Cheltenham Music Festival

Alexandra Hamilton-Ayres, 12th July

The concert opened with BBC newsreader Julia Somerville, summarising news from the year 1915 at an old-fashioned broadcasting desk complete with microphone. It was informative, and set the scene for this recital, one in a series of 'time capsule' concerts, solely featuring music composed in 1915 – including two of Debussy's last chamber pieces.



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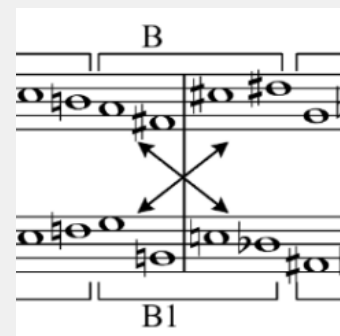
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Mark Pullinger

Mark is one of Bachtrack's editors. He is Chair of the Music Section of The Critics' Circle and member of its Dance Section. An experienced opera critic, with a passion for Verdi, he can often be found propping up a standing place at the ROH. He also reviews concerts and dance, with a particular love for Russian and French repertoire. Mark contributes to Gramophone and Opera magazines and blogs at Beckmesser's Quill.

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