

SOMMCD 0190

Céleste Series

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Septet Op. 20 for Clarinet, Horn, Bassoon and Strings

WEBER/KÜFFNER

Introduction, Theme and Variations for Clarinet and String Quartet

STRAUSS arr. JOHNSON: Frühlingsstimmen · Perpetuum Mobile

Emma Johnson^a *clarinet*
 Carducci String Quartet^b
 (Matthew Denton^c, Michelle Fleming *violins*
 Eoin Schmidt-Martin^c *viola*
 Emma Denton^c *cello*)

Chris West^{cd} *double bass*
 Philip Gibbon^{cd} *bassoon*
 Peter Francombe^{cd} *horn*

1 **WEBER/KÜFFNER Introduction, Theme and Variations^{ab}** 10:22

BEETHOVEN: Septet Op. 20, in E-flat major^{ac}

2 I Adagio – Allegro con brio 10:16

3 II Adagio cantabile 8:53

4 III Tempo di Menuetto 3:10

5 IV Tema con Variazioni: Andante 7:07

6 V Scherzo: Allegro molto e vivace 3:04

7 VI Andante con moto alla Marcia – Presto 8:29

8 **STRAUSS arr. JOHNSON: Frühlingsstimmen^{abd}** 2:30

9 **STRAUSS arr. JOHNSON: Perpetuum Mobile^{abd}** 3:44

Total Duration: 57:38

Recorded live at Turner Sims, University of Southampton on October 7, 2017

Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Ben Connellan

Front cover: Beethoven by Joseph Willibrord Mähler (1778-1860) (detail)

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Peter Francombe *horn*

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Recorded live in concert at



Beethoven's Septet was first heard in Vienna in 1800, at a particularly significant time in the history of European art music. The year not only marked the dawn of the 19th century, but also was the fulcrum between the end of the Classical era and the early growth of Romanticism, and if any composer personified that time more than any other it was Beethoven. Ten years before, Haydn and Mozart were still alive, composing steadily; the 20-year-old Beethoven was finding his compositional voice. Ten years later, with both older men dead, it was a different world, personified by the increasingly deaf Beethoven, who since 1800 had shocked the musical world with his *Eroica*, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and the *Emperor* Piano Concerto. Vienna itself was under direct threat from Napoleon's army.

Yet in Beethoven's work we are hardly aware of the historical context, although his music could not have appeared at any other period, for it grew from its immediate predecessors and unwittingly laid the foundations for the succeeding great composers of the 19th century.

Before his increasing deafness took hold, Beethoven was an active performing musician, a competent violinist as well as pianist. He played in trio and quartet groups with friends, and he would certainly have known the greatest string trio, Mozart's Divertimento K.563, published in 1792, a few months after the composer's untimely death. Beethoven knew that to arrive at symphonic mastery he had to grasp the form evolved by Haydn and adopted by Mozart (as well as, of course, by many other composers) towards the end of the 18th century, a form which more properly first evolved through the medium of the string quartet – and for him the string trio. If he knew Mozart's K.563, as we believe he did, it remains a remarkable fact that Beethoven's self-imposed discipline of understanding, from the inside, so to speak, how symphonic writing 'worked' was demonstrated in the five string trios which comprise his Opp.3, 8

and 9 – the Opp.3 and 8 works being in the manner of a divertimento (seven and six movements, respectively); it is the three four-movement Trios of Opus 9 which can be said to be symphonic in structure.

Having achieved such mastery, Beethoven could then tackle the string quartet medium with confidence: his six Quartets, Opus 18 show the full extent of his true grasp of symphonic form; after those masterpieces, he was ready to tackle the orchestra in the C major Symphony, Opus 21 – with that work, Beethoven and the orchestral symphony were conjoined. However, the C major Symphony was not the only work by Beethoven in that Vienna programme in 1800 – as well as music by Mozart and Haydn, the audience heard his B-flat major Piano Concerto (Beethoven was also the soloist) and the first performance of his Septet, Opus 20.

One wonders what many thought of the 30-year-old's music that evening: the Concerto – fine; a new voice to follow Mozart's masterpieces in that form; the Symphony – well, it begins in the 'wrong' key, there's no real 'slow' movement, and some considered it had too much 'wrong' with it. But the Septet – that was a different matter; it proved to be the hit of the programme: lighter in expression, the Septet's six-movement form followed almost exactly that of Mozart's Divertimento K.563; the audience was not challenged as they had been in the Symphony. Within a short time the Septet had become one of Beethoven's most popular works – which he resented, but didn't discourage. Beethoven's dislike for the Septet was caused by the immense popularity of the work at the time and the neglect of some of his other music which he rightly felt to be more important.

But the Septet's popularity was deserved. It is by no means superficial, yet abounds in felicitous light fancy and delicious invention. Like nearly all early Beethoven, its inherent style owes little to Mozart or Haydn, standing apart as a work of

unquestionable independence of expression, already looking towards the initial decades of the new century.

For example, it is surprising how Schubert is foreshadowed in Beethoven's Septet. The main figure of the first theme of the *Allegro con brio* looks forward to the finale of Schubert's Fourth Symphony, while the minor variation in the fourth movement clearly possesses Schubertian depth, yet Schubert was only three-years-old when the Septet appeared.

After the symphony, Beethoven's orchestral works developed beyond the creative imagination of any composer of the time, against which the Septet may have been considered little more than a *jeu d'esprit*. Later musicians – notably the conductor Arturo Toscanini – took a more perceptive view, performing the work in concerts with full string strength. Toscanini doubtless considered aspects of Beethoven's Septet to be truly symphonic, despite its late-18th-century six-movement serenade structure, and given the proximity in the composition of the Septet and First Symphony, influences from one to the other are more evident than would otherwise appear. The instrumentation of the Septet (clarinet, horn, bassoon, violin, viola, cello and double bass) was unique up to that time – a fact which would not have been lost on Beethoven's contemporaries.

In formal terms, Beethoven is already stretching the established norms: the six movements, as we have noted, follow almost exactly those of Mozart's K.563. But Beethoven begins the first movement with a majestic slow introduction – echoed in the C major Symphony – which in the Septet is balanced by a similar slow introduction to the finale, an innovation also used in the finale of the Symphony. Beethoven further courts popularity by basing his (as was the custom) variation movement on a popular

Rhenish song of the time: *Ach Schiffer, lieber Schiffer* – a choice not unknown to many in the audience.

Each of the six movements is filled with sunny gaiety – a characteristic which also is often heard in the First Symphony. And by making the closing section of the work *Presto*, Beethoven further engages with his audience, the final pages inspiring warm and affectionate applause. The Septet is dedicated to the Empress Maria Theresia, and notwithstanding his initial antipathy regarding the Septet's popularity, Beethoven arranged the work as a Trio for clarinet (or violin), cello and piano, publishing this version as his Opus 38 in 1805.

In the Septet's scoring for solo wind instruments (rather than in customary 'pairs'), plus single strings, a notable feature throughout the work is the prominence Beethoven gives to the single clarinet – an instrument which, so to speak, had 'joined' the orchestra less than 20 years earlier, and for which Mozart composed his last great concerto.



Carl Maria von Weber was 16 years younger than Beethoven, and was trained as a professional musician from childhood – as, of course, was Mozart. There is a closer connexion between them: Weber was a cousin of Mozart's wife Constanze, but he never knew the genius from Salzburg, for Weber was five-years-old when Mozart died. Weber's own death at 39 from tuberculosis was to mean he predeceased Beethoven by 11 months. As Mozart's great works for clarinet were inspired by the playing of Anton Stadler, so Weber's more extensive compositions for clarinet (two Concertos, a Concertino with orchestra, a quintet and other works) were directly inspired by Heinrich Baermann, a renowned virtuoso for whom Mendelssohn also wrote, and with whom Weber formed a close professional relationship.



Photograph: © Eaton Square Concerts

The number of works for clarinet that Weber composed led to another piece, entitled Introduction, Theme and Variations for clarinet and string quartet, being posthumously attributed to him. For many years Weber was cited as the composer. However, recent scholarship has questioned this, and it is now ascribed to Joseph Küffner (1776-1856). For the general music-lover, not much is known about Küffner, a violinist and later military bandmaster, but on the basis of this lovely work he was clearly a fine musician and gifted composer.

The date of composition of this work is, of course, unknown; it is relatively short overall, but its inherent musicality and the beauty and cut of its themes and their treatment demonstrate quite clearly that this beautiful piece is well worth the attention of all lovers of music from the early Romantic period.

The Introduction presents a theme of which any composer – Mozart and Beethoven included – would have been proud; the ‘Theme’ on which the Variations are based is more lively, but dreaminess is never far away, before being finally banished in the headlong rush to the work’s delightful conclusion.



Beethoven, of course, lived in Vienna for all of his adult life, where, two years before he died, the eldest son of Johann Strauss, composer of light music and orchestral conductor, was born. The boy, also named Johann, was to become by far the most famous and most wealthy member of the Strauss dynasty – there were eventually five gifted composer-performers of the musical family: Johann I, his sons Johann II, Josef and Eduard, and Eduard’s son, Johann III.

The Strauss family is synonymous with the waltz, but all five also composed polkas and marches, quadrilles and other short pieces. They didn't invent the waltz, of course – in fact, Weber's solo piano piece, *Invitation to the Dance* (a waltz), composed in 1819, preceded the Strauss waltzes – but it is those by Johann II that remain the most famous, of which *Roses from the South*, which he wrote in 1882, bearing the impressive opus number 410, is one of his finest compositions. Known to musicians and music-lovers of succeeding generations – its melodic inspiration shining through this delightful arrangement by Emma Johnson for eight players, who has also arranged Johann II's hectic *jeu d'esprit* entitled *Perpetuum Mobile*, Op.257 (1861), a work which fully demonstrates how a greatly talented composer can continue to improvise on a given rhythmical and harmonic basis almost indefinitely – a skill of which the young Beethoven, as well as Mozart and Haydn, would certainly have approved.

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EMMA JOHNSON is one of the few clarinetists to have established a career as a solo performer which has taken her to major European, American and Asian venues and to Africa and Australasia.

One of the UK's biggest-selling classical artists, she has sold over half a million albums. A passionate advocate of the clarinet as a solo instrument, she has also commissioned new works for it.

She gives concerts with her own group, Emma Johnson and Friends, and has had rave reviews for her jazz trio, Clarinet Goes to Town. Her compositions and arrangements have been published by Music Sales and Faber Music and she has undertaken many education projects communicating her love of music to the next generation.

Television appearances range from a Sky Arts recital to gala BBC Proms concerts. Emma played the hit, Ivor Novello Award-winning theme tune for the BBC's *The Victorian Kitchen Garden*. Radio work includes *Artist of the Week* for BBC Radio 3, Classic FM and stations worldwide.

Born in London, her career was launched as victor of the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition in 1984, followed by the Young Concert Artists Auditions in New York. She studied Music and English at Cambridge University and was the first woman to be made an Honorary Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge and to have her portrait commissioned by the college. She was awarded an MBE in 1996.

With Emma Johnson and Friends, she coupled Schubert's Octet and Bernhard Crusell's Concert Trio for SOMM Recordings in 2016, hailed by *MusicWeb International* as "excellent... a winner".

Emma plays an instrument made by the English clarinet maker, Peter Eaton.

www.emmajohnson.co.uk

 [@ClarinetEmmaJ](https://twitter.com/ClarinetEmmaJ)

In 2018 **PETER FRANCOMBE** celebrates 30 years as principal horn with the Royal Northern Sinfonia. Regularly invited as guest principal by many other orchestras – including the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Philharmonia, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and City of Birmingham Symphony – Peter also plays chamber music with the Nash, Prometheus and Albion ensembles. He has recorded horn concertos with the Royal Northern Sinfonia on Pan Classics. Recent concerto performances include the Strauss

Horn Concerto No.1 at the Sage, Gateshead with Thomas Zehetmair conducting, and Mozart's Second Horn Concerto with the London Mozart Players at St John's, Smith Square in London.

Peter began playing the horn at the age of 10, gaining early experience with the Brighton Youth Orchestra. He was awarded a scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music and then later the Van Cliburn Foundation Scholarship to study at the Guildhall School of Music.

PHILIP GIBBON read history at Pembroke College, Cambridge and received his musical education at the Royal Northern College of Music and the Prague Academy of Music. He plays principal bassoon with Garsington Opera and the Rambert Dance Company amongst others, as well as appearing in chamber concerts in Britain and Europe. He has made numerous recordings for radio and CD including for Hyperion Records.

An internationally renowned Anglo-Irish string quartet based in the UK, the versatile and award-winning **CARDUCCI STRING QUARTET** was founded in 1997 around the talents of Matthew Denton and Michelle Fleming (violins), Eoin Schmidt-Martin (viola) and Emma Denton (cello). The quartet has won numerous international competitions, including the 2007 Concert Artists Guild International Competition and First Prize at Finland's Kuhmo International Chamber Music Competition in 2004.

In 2016, they took home a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for their performances of cycles of the complete Shostakovich String Quartets. They have released a bevy of acclaimed recordings and perform over 90 concerts worldwide each year at venues

such as London's Wigmore Hall, Dublin's National Concert Hall, the Tivoli Concert Hall, Copenhagen, the Frick Collection and Carnegie Hall, New York, the Library of Congress and John F Kennedy Center, Washington D.C., St Lawrence Center for the Arts, Toronto and Concertgebouw, Amsterdam.

The quartet also run an annual festival in Highnam, Gloucester and are quartet in residence at Dean Close School in Cheltenham, where they teach young string players and coach chamber music. In September 2014 they curated their first Carducci Festival in Castagneto Carducci, Italy, the town from which they took their name.

CHRIS WEST appears regularly as guest principal with many of Britain's major orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and the English Chamber Orchestra. He was for many years the solo double bass player with the Guildhall Strings with whom he appeared in venues around the world such as Carnegie Hall, New York. Chris has premiered many new works for solo double bass including a concerto by Matthew Taylor at the Brighton Festival and a new concerto written by Clive Jenkins with the Chamber Ensemble of London in Dartington.

He enjoys his work as Professor of Double Bass at Trinity Laban College of Music, London and he is also in demand as a chamber musician; a recent recording of the Vaughan Williams Piano Quintet with the London Soloists Ensemble reached number seven on the Classical Charts. He can be heard on TV and film soundtracks such as *Downton Abbey*, *Dr Who* and the *Harry Potter* films.

He plays an 18th-century double bass made by Giovanni Battista Ceruti in Cremona.