

Treasures from the New World

Chamber music by **Amy Beach** (1867-1944),
Henrique Oswald (1852-1931) and **Marlos Nobre** (b.1939)

Clélia Iruzun *piano*

Coull Quartet – Roger Coull^a, Philip Gallaway *violin*,
Jonathan Barritt *viola*, Nicholas Roberts *cello*

AMY BEACH Piano Quintet in F-sharp minor, Op.67 [29:21]

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|---|-------------------|-------|
| 1 | Adagio | 9:45 |
| 2 | Adagio espressivo | 9:29 |
| 3 | Allegro agitato | 10:09 |

HENRIQUE OSWALD Piano Quintet in C major, Op.18 [26:52]

- | | | |
|---|------------------|------|
| 4 | Allegro moderato | 8:02 |
| 5 | Scherzo | 4:01 |
| 6 | Molto adagio | 7:19 |
| 7 | Molto allegro | 7:30 |

8 **MARLOS NOBRE** Poema XXI, Op.94 No.21* 3:54

9 **AMY BEACH** Romance for Violin and Piano^a 6:32

Total duration: 66:46

*First recording

Treasures from the New World



Piano Quintets by
**Amy Beach &
Henrique Oswald**

Clélia Iruzun *piano*
Coull Quartet
Includes a First Recording

Treasures from the New World

This programme presents two piano quintets, both late Romantic works by composers from the Americas. The genre of the piano quintet – for piano, two violins, viola and cello – was established by Robert Schumann with his work in that form of 1842. In the following decades it became a staple of the chamber music repertoire, with significant examples by Brahms, Dvořák and later Fauré. The Piano Quintets by Amy Beach (1867-1944) and Henrique Oswald (1852-1931) demonstrate influences from many of these European models, yet both composers have their own individual voice. The two Quintets fell into obscurity in the 20th century, as the Romantic aesthetics of Beach and Oswald were sidelined by later fashions, but both deserve reappraisal, for the openly expressive style of the music, and for the continuous melodic invention that propels both works.

Amy Beach (née Cheney, and published under her married name, Mrs. H.H.A. Beach) was the foremost female American composer of her day. She was born in Henniker, New Hampshire and showed prodigious talent from a young age. She trained as a pianist in Boston, although was largely self-taught as a composer, with just one year of formal training, in harmony and counterpoint with Junius W. Hill. In 1885, she made her debut as a concert pianist, playing in the Chopin Piano Concerto No.2 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

The same year, she married Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a Boston-based surgeon, and, in accordance with his wishes, restricted her performances mostly

to annual recitals, focusing her career instead on composition. Dr. Beach was 24 years Amy's senior, and his death in 1910 allowed her to pursue a broader career as a performer. She spent the following years in Europe, performing mainly in Germany, but returned to America at the outbreak of World War I. From the 1920s, she regularly resided at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire and became known as one of the 'Boston Six' group of New England composers. In her later years, she served as the President of the Board of Councillors of the New England Conservatory of Music and used her status to help young musicians and composers, especially women.

Beach was most acclaimed during her lifetime as a composer of songs, and wrote over 150, spanning her career. But she was also the first American female composer to gain recognition for larger-scale orchestral works, particularly for her *Gaelic Symphony* (1896) and *Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor* (1899). She also composed large-scale choral works, her *Mass in E-flat major* (1892) another notable early success. Chamber music was an important element of her career, both as a pianist and a composer. As a performer, she was familiar with the piano quintet literature: she performed the Schumann Piano Quintet in Boston in 1894 with the Kneisel String Quartet, led by Franz Kneisel, leader of the Boston Symphony, and in 1900, the Brahms Piano Quintet with the same group. She was pianist, too, for the premiere of her own Piano Quintet in F-sharp minor in 1908. The Quintet received over 40 performances during Beach's lifetime, with the composer presenting the work in Munich in 1913, and across America during a lengthy tour, again with the Kneisel Quartet, in 1916 and 1917.

Though the work of a distinctive and mature voice (it was Beach's Op.67), the Quintet was clearly influenced by her early exposure to the piano quintets of Brahms and Schumann. The work's main theme, which appears in all three movements, quotes the second theme from the finale of the Brahms Quintet. But Beach writes in a more melancholic and pensive style, especially in the sombre introduction to the first movement. This gives way to a more Slavic-sounding main section, though the tone is still dark. The slow second movement is marked *Adagio espressivo*. It begins with a simple but lyrical melody, before increasing in emotional intensity and thematic complexity towards a passionate climax. The influence of Schumann is apparent in the finale, which, like Schumann's, is propulsive and seems destined for rigorous fugal development. But Beach breaks off the fugue to complete the movement instead with reminiscences from the previous movements, before building to grand coda, bright but still richly textured.

The Brazilian composer Henrique Oswald was born 15 years before Amy Beach, and like her brought a New World perspective to European Romantic traditions. But Oswald had closer connections to Europe: his parents were Swiss and Italian, and, after early training in São Paulo, he travelled to Italy to study, in Florence, where he would remain for about 30 years. Oswald returned to Brazil in 1902 and was appointed director of the Instituto Nacional de Música in Rio de Janeiro. Although he resigned the post three years later, he remained a prominent figure in Brazilian public life, especially in Rio, where he continued to teach piano at the institute. He also served as the Brazilian consul in both The Hague and Genoa.

Where Beach's European influences were primarily German, Oswald's were more from the French Romantics; the pianist Arthur Rubinstein, who was a close friend, dubbed him "the Brazilian Fauré". That epithet also reflects Oswald's focus on short piano works, for which he was best known in his lifetime. One of these, a miniature called *Il neige*, won a contest in 1902 organised by the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro*, with a jury that included Saint-Saëns and Fauré himself. It became his best-known composition. But Oswald was prolific in many genres, including orchestral and large-scale choral works. He also wrote many chamber works: two cello sonatas, three piano trios, two piano quartets, four string quartets, a string octet and the Piano Quintet presented here. Oswald's style proved well suited to these larger chamber combinations, his accompanying textures sophisticated and diverse, and his flowing, lyrical melodies always prominent.

The Piano Quintet was completed in 1895, towards the end of Oswald's years in Florence. Its dedication is to "Signora Karl Hillebrand", who was Jessie Lassout, a British pianist and formerly a close associate of both Wagner and Liszt, who had become a key figure in the musical life of Florence and an influential piano teacher. As with his other chamber works, Oswald did not seek publication for the Piano Quintet (it was eventually published in 1937 six years after his death), but he performed it regularly as a centrepiece of his chamber music recitals.

The work shows a range of European influences: the structural rigour of the outer movements looks back to Schumann, while the colouristic harmonies suggest the influence of French contemporaries, particularly Fauré. The Quintet

is in four movements. In the first, strident but always lyrical melodies propel the music. The second is a scherzo, characterised by busy rhythms passed back and forth between piano and strings. The third movement is slow, marked *Molto Adagio*. Oswald's gift for heartfelt melody is clearly apparent here, although the mood is more reserved than in the corresponding movement of the Beach Quintet. The finale is propelled by nimble virtuoso piano lines, but the momentum is regularly interrupted by new ideas and graceful interplay between the voices. That mood continues into the coda, a decisive but modest conclusion that belies the scale of the work.

The contemporary Brazilian composer Marlos Nobre (born 1939) has pursued a similar career to that of his compatriot Oswald, studying both at home and abroad and dividing his career between teaching and composition. Nobre was born in the city of Recife, where he studied at the Conservatory of Music of Pernambuco from 1948 to 1959, with later studies in Buenos Aires, as well as at Tanglewood and Princeton. Since then, he has been a visiting professor and guest composer at many American universities, and has been active as a pianist and conductor in Europe and the Americas.

Nobre's music typically has a distinctive South American character, drawing on traditional dance forms to create rhythmic vitality and drive. But *Poema XXI* is different, a short work for piano and strings (two violins, viola, cello and double bass) with a broad, elegant melody. The melody is drawn from an earlier work, the *Concertante do Imaginário* for piano and string orchestra, Op.74, where it is the main theme of the slow movement. The *Poema* cycle, Op.94, is a series of

arrangements of the theme for different combinations, initially piano and solo instrument, but later, as here, piano and ensemble. Though the theme is not typical of Nobre's work, he sees it as a valuable diversion, and comments "I can say I am a contemporary composer still capable of writing a beautiful melody!"

The programme ends with an early work by Amy Beach, her Romance for Violin and Piano, Op.23. The Romance was written in 1893 and dedicated to the violinist Maud Powell. The violinist and composer were contemporaries, born just two weeks apart, and both had been child prodigies. Powell, who was from Aurora, Illinois, had trained in Europe. When she returned to the United States, she championed American composers, including Beach, and also made great efforts to encourage women to play the violin, this at a time when women were precluded from joining professional orchestras. In 1893, a Women's Musical Congress was convened, as part of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Powell was invited to speak and gave a paper entitled *Women and the Violin*. Beach wrote her Romance for the occasion and accompanied Powell for the premiere. The performance was a great success, and the work was immediately encored. During the second rendition, the manuscript fell from Powell's stand, yet she played on regardless, the music already committed to memory.

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Clélia Iruzun's endearing artistic personality, which combines her native Brazilian spirit with her exceptional musical gifts, has enabled this much-admired London-based pianist to build an enviable reputation for her performances of a wide range of music, from the great classical repertoire to works by significant figures from across the Americas.

Clélia Iruzun initially studied at the School of Music in Rio de Janeiro before becoming an

advanced student at London's Royal Academy of Music, where she won a number of major prizes. She has subsequently worked with Nelson Freire, Jacques Klein, Stephen Kovacevich and Fou Ts'ong, among other international artists, and many important Brazilian composers have written works for her.

Clélia's busy life embraces frequent appearances across Europe, the Americas and Asia. She has performed on television and radio in many countries, including frequent broadcasts for BBC Radio 3.

She has premiered music by such significant Brazilian composers as Francisco Mignone, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Henrique Oswald, Marlos Nobre, João Guilherme Ripper, Radamés Gnattali and others in many countries and given the South American premieres of important English piano music, notably works by Arnold Bax and York Bowen.

Her much-admired discography ranges from Latin American composers to concertos by Mendelssohn and the British composer Elizabeth Maconchy's *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra* with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Other CDs include the piano music of Marlos Nobre and Ernesto Nazareth for Lorelt.

Recently released to great acclaim on SOMM Recordings were her 2019 International Classical Music Award-nominated accounts of the Piano Concertos of Francisco Mignone and Isaac Albéniz with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Jac van Steen, a disc hailed by *International Piano*: "Clélia comes into her vivid own, playing with a superb mastery and empathy; it is difficult to imagine it played with greater skill and affection".

www.cleliairuzun.com

 @CleliaIruzun



Roger Coull *violin*
Philip Gallaway *violin*

Jonathan Barritt *viola*
Nicholas Roberts *cello*

Formed in 1974 by Royal Academy of Music students under the guidance of renowned quartet leader Sidney Griller, the Coull Quartet rapidly achieved national recognition. In addition to performing and broadcasting extensively throughout the UK, the quartet, which still includes two of its founder members, has made tours of western Europe, North and South America, Australia, China, India and the Far East, and for over 40 years were Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Warwick.

Since the mid-1980s the Coull Quartet has made over 30 recordings featuring a wide selection of the repertoire closest to their hearts, from the complete Mendelssohn and Schubert quartets to 20th century and contemporary British chamber music. Their CD of quartets by Maw and Britten on SOMM Recordings received universal acclaim. Featured as a *Gramophone* 'Editor's Choice', it was described as the 'Benchmark Recording' by *BBC Music Magazine*. More recent recordings of music by Sibelius, Ian Venables and Alan Ridout have also received excellent reviews in major musical publications.

Their impressive and unusual list of commissions includes works by Sally Beamish, Edward Cowie, Joe Cutler, David Matthews, Nicholas Maw, Robert Simpson and Howard Skempton. These include string quartets, quintets with piano or wind player, works with solo voice or choir, and even a piece for quartet and table tennis players! The Quartet's exploration of music from the Americas with distinguished Brazilian pianist Clélia Iruzun has led to UK premieres of works by renowned Brazilian composers such as Francisco Mignone, Marlos Nobre and João Guilherme Ripper.

Reviewers often single out the rare combination of maturity and freshness which characterises the Quartet's performances: "Here the playing is so brimful with enthusiasm and commitment, and at the same time so infused with the accumulated wisdom of three decades, that the music simply reinvents itself as it should". (*The Strad*)

www.coullquartet.com