

Vida Guitar Quartet

Saturday 18 April, 7.30pm



Chris Stell . Mark Eden . Amanda Cook . Mark Ashford

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
(arr. Mark Ashford)

English Folk Song Suite

March: Seventeen Come Sunday
Intermezzo: My Bonny Boy
March: Folk Songs From Somerset

Mozart (1756-1791) / **Grieg** (1843-1907)
(arr. Mark Eden)

Piano Sonata No 16 K545 'Sonata facile'
Allegro
Andante
Rondo. Allegretto

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) (arr. Mark Eden)
Fantasie in F minor D940

INTERVAL

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) (arr. Chris Stell)
Hungarian Dance No 1
Hungarian Dance No 3
Hungarian Dance No 5

Phillip Houghton (1954-2017)

Opals

No 1 Black Opal
No 2 Water Opal
No 3 White Opal

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) (arr. Mark Eden)

Holberg Suite Op 40
Praeludium
Sarabande
Gavotte-Musette-Gavotte
Air
Rigaudon

Vaughan Williams

English Folk Song Suite

It was in 1903 that English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams first started to collect folk songs from across the British Isles. During the next 10 years he collected a total of 800 songs and variants. Subsequently, he devoted his life to bringing this music to the masses in many different forms such as hymns, orchestral works, ballets, etc. Vaughan-Williams was most concerned that these melodies would be lost to future generations and described the songs as being 'extremely beautiful.'

Vaughan Williams wrote the suite in 1923 for military band. The following year, Williams' student Gordon Jacob arranged it for full orchestra and brass band. Interestingly, this piece originally was in four movements, with a second movement called 'Sea Songs', but Vaughan Williams took it out and published it as a separate, stand-alone piece.

The opening song of the first movement, 'Seventeen Come Sunday', is an English folk song of the same name that was also popular in Ireland and Scotland. It is one of those songs that early editors felt obliged to censor for publication (an earlier version was entitled 'The Maid and the Soldier.') 'Pretty Caroline' is the next folk tune in the movement. The third folk tune in this movement is Dives and Lazarus, which is also a Christmas Carol.

The second movement begins and ends with a mournful song of lost love, 'My Bonny Boy.' The middle section of this movement contains 'Green Bushes,' a popular dance-song.

The last movement, 'Folk Songs from Somerset', is based on the melodies of four folk songs: 'Blow Away the Morning Dew,' 'High Germany,' 'Whistle, Daughter, Whistle' and 'John Barleycorn.'

The lyrics to all the folk songs can be found at <http://englishfolksongsuite.weebly.com/about-the-music.html>.

Mozart/Grieg

Piano Sonata No 16 K545 'Sonata facile'

The exact circumstances of the composition of the Piano Sonata No 16 in C major, K545 are unknown. Although well known today, the piece was not published in Mozart's lifetime and didn't appear in print until 1805, well after the composer's death.

The famous pianist Artur Schnabel famously said of the sonatas of Mozart that they were too easy for children and too difficult for artists. The sonata K545 was described by Mozart in his own catalogue as 'for beginners,' and it is very commonly known by the nickname 'Sonata facile' or 'Sonata semplice' (easy or simple sonata). Despite this, the sonata is simple only in a superficial sense; there is nothing easy about music that is so spare that it exposes instantly any digital or emotional deficiencies in the performer.

The sonata also defies any hints of what we might think of as a 'late' work. The central Andante, sensitive throughout to delicacy and longing, is the work of the mature artist, but can anyone detect in this Sonata's sparkle and elegance any trace of finality or mortality?

In 1876, after returning from a trip to Bayreuth to see the first complete Ring cycles, Edvard Grieg and his friend John Paulson travelled up and down Norway. As a treat for the poet Paulson, Grieg took four piano sonatas by Mozart and added second piano parts, in a manner of speaking, 'orchestrating' them. To the K545 sonata he added spread arpeggios and rapid scales, and, in the final movement, echo effects, doubling the principal line and transforming Mozart's gallant style into something approaching a neo-Lisztian virtuosity.

In romanticising these quintessentially classical works, Grieg has approached them as someone who had admired Mozart since childhood. His first intent was to use these

works for their didactic qualities but a couple of public concerts in the hands of other performers persuaded him that there was something more here. Grieg's 'orchestrations' were daring moves for a composer who was still largely unpublished. The German publishers who turned the work down said they were waiting for authentic Grieg rather than reworked Mozart, but now that Grieg's reputation is firmly established, we have reason to go back and look at these works again.

Franz Schubert **Fantasia in F minor D940**

Franz Schubert's Fantasia in F minor for piano and four hands, stands as a remarkable gem within the composer's extensive body of work. Composed in 1828, just a year before his untimely death, this Fantasia reflects Schubert's profound artistic maturity and creative prowess.

The work has four clearly defined movements which run continuously creating a musical Odyssey. It opens with an introspective and melancholic theme, drawing the listener into its world of contemplation and yearning. Schubert employs subtle harmonic shifts and delicate nuances, creating a sense of profound unfolding emotions.

The central scherzo-like movement forms a counterbalance to the work's opening and closing sections. Here the music is vivacious and more light-hearted in character with a central rondo theme on which Schubert pivots other musical ideas, generating fluid interplay between the parts and demonstrating his prowess as one of the great chamber composers of the era.

The haunting opening returns and Schubert starts to explore new facets of the thematic material in a development section; the music oscillating between tranquillity and turmoil. The musical tempest comes to abrupt halt and the

opening mood returns once again.

The Fantasia is a profound musical testament which encapsulates the philosophy of the Romantic era; deep introspection, vivid emotions, and virtuosic brilliance all coming together to create a work of enduring beauty.

Brahms **Hungarian Dances**

When Johannes Brahms published his 'Hungarian Dances' in 1869, he could hardly have imagined that they would become some of his most beloved and widely performed works. Bursting with rhythmic vitality, fiery accents, and sweeping lyricism, these dances capture the spirit of Hungarian folk and Romani (Gypsy) musical traditions that Brahms encountered in his youth.

As a young pianist, Brahms toured with the Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi, who introduced him to the distinctive style known as 'verbunkos' - music characterised by dramatic tempo contrasts, ornamental melodies, and exuberant rhythmic snap. Though Brahms did not collect these tunes himself, he arranged and stylised melodies he encountered, transforming them into piano works of irresistible charm and colour. (Only a few of the 21 dances are entirely original; the rest are based on traditional themes.)

Hungarian Dance No 1 in G minor

The first dance opens with dark, smouldering intensity. Marked by bold syncopations and sharply accented rhythms, it alternates between brooding, minor-key passages and bursts of spirited brilliance. Sudden shifts in tempo - hallmarks of Hungarian style - create a sense of improvisatory flair, as though the music were unfolding spontaneously in a village celebration. The work's dramatic sweep and fiery close make it an electrifying concert opener.

Hungarian Dance No 3 in F major

In contrast, No 3 offers elegance and buoyancy. Its graceful main theme dances lightly, propelled by lilting rhythms and playful exchanges between voices. Even in its more animated moments, there is a refined charm and warmth that reflects Brahms's gift for blending folk vitality with classical balance. The dance sparkles rather than blazes, providing a delightful contrast within the set.

Hungarian Dance No 5 in F-sharp minor

Perhaps the most famous of all the dances, No 5 has become synonymous with Brahms's name. Its dramatic opening, with emphatic dotted rhythms and sweeping gestures, immediately commands attention. The central sections contrast fiery drive with tender lyricism, before racing toward a whirlwind conclusion. The piece's theatrical flair and infectious energy have made it a favourite not only in concert halls but also in popular culture.

Together, these three dances reveal Brahms's remarkable ability to honour folk inspiration while shaping it with masterful craftsmanship. They are at once earthy and sophisticated - music that invites listeners to tap their feet, feel the pulse, and revel in the sheer joy of rhythm and melody.

Philip Houghton Opals

Australian composer and guitarist Philip Houghton is celebrated for expanding the expressive and coloristic possibilities of the classical guitar. His music often draws inspiration from the natural world, visual art, and the distinctive landscapes of Australia. In 'Opals', Houghton turns to one of his country's most iconic natural treasures, translating the shifting colours and inner fire of the gemstone into sound.

Composed in 1993, 'Opals' is a three-movement

suite, each movement named after a different variety of opal. Rather than depicting the stones in a literal way, Houghton captures their iridescence and layered depth through innovative textures, harmonics, and shimmering timbral effects. The work has become a cornerstone of the modern guitar repertoire, admired for both its technical demands and its evocative atmosphere.

Black Opal

The first movement evokes the rare and prized black opal, known for its dark body tone and flashes of vivid colour. Houghton uses resonant bass notes and shadowed harmonies to create a mysterious backdrop, against which brilliant harmonics and rapid figurations flicker like sudden sparks of light. The interplay between darkness and radiance gives the movement a sense of depth and quiet intensity.

Water Opal

In contrast, the second movement suggests a more translucent, luminous quality. Flowing arpeggios and gently unfolding melodic lines create an atmosphere of calm and clarity. Subtle dynamic shifts and delicate articulations allow colours to emerge gradually, as if turning the stone in one's hand and watching new hues reveal themselves.

White Opal

The final movement bursts forth with energy. Rhythmic drive, percussive effects, and brilliant passagework conjure the fiery brilliance for which this variety is known. Houghton exploits the guitar's full range - from biting accents to ringing upper-register harmonics - building toward an exuberant and virtuosic conclusion.

Throughout 'Opals', Houghton demonstrates his deep understanding of the guitar's capacity for colour and resonance. The piece invites listeners not only to hear, but to 'see' through sound - experiencing shifting light, layered texture, and the quiet wonder of nature transformed into music.

Edvard Grieg

Holberg Suite Op 40

Composed in 1884 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg, Grieg's 'Holberg Suite' is a delightful homage to the elegance and poise of the 18th century. Subtitled 'From Holberg's Time', the work reflects Grieg's imaginative re-creation of Baroque dance forms through the lens of Romantic harmony and expressive warmth.

Originally written for solo piano and later arranged by the composer for string orchestra - the version most frequently performed today - the suite exemplifies Grieg's gift for blending clarity of form with lyrical charm. Though inspired by Baroque models such as those of Johann Sebastian Bach, the music is unmistakably Grieg's: rich in colour, graceful in melody, and imbued with a subtle Nordic character.

I. Prelude

The suite opens with a buoyant and energetic Prelude. Sparkling scales and lively rhythms propel the movement forward, evoking the spirited vitality of Baroque instrumental writing. Yet beneath its crisp articulation lies a Romantic fullness of harmony and texture, giving the music both brilliance and warmth.

II. Sarabande

In contrast, the Sarabande unfolds with dignified calm. Traditionally a slow, stately dance in triple meter, it here becomes a

moment of poised introspection. Broad phrases and expressive suspensions create an atmosphere of noble restraint, allowing the ensemble's blended sonorities to shine.

III. Gavotte (with Musette)

The Gavotte offers courtly charm and lightness. Its clear, balanced phrases recall the refined dances of 18th-century salons. At its centre lies a Musette section, characterised by a sustained drone that evokes rustic bagpipes - a gentle nod to folk tradition within the framework of Baroque style.

IV. Air

The emotional heart of the suite, the Air sings with tender lyricism. A long-breathed melody unfolds over a softly pulsing accompaniment, creating a sense of serene beauty. Grieg's melodic gift is fully on display, as the music speaks with both simplicity and depth.

V. Rigaudon

The final movement bursts forth with rhythmic vigour. The lively, leaping theme alternates with a contrasting, more lyrical middle section before returning in exuberant fashion. The suite concludes with a flourish, bringing together elegance and energy in joyful celebration.

In the 'Holberg Suite', Grieg bridges centuries - honouring the forms of the past while infusing them with Romantic expressiveness and his own distinctive voice. The result is music that feels both timeless and immediate: graceful, radiant, and irresistibly engaging.

The Vida Guitar Quartet brings together four guitarists of exceptional artistry and 'unerring musical instinct' (Gramophone).

Vida's ability to 'conjure up an orchestral palette of colour and effects' (Classic FM) combined with their 'exquisite tonal and

dynamic control' has firmly established them as a passionate and masterful ensemble who sparkle with 'vitality and spontaneity' (Acoustic).

Vida's seemingly effortless sense of ensemble and their broad range of timbres and dynamics



evokes 'listening to an entire orchestra and not merely to four guitars. There's only one word for it: magic' (Gramophone).

Since forming in 2007, Vida has performed to critical acclaim in major UK venues including King's Place (London), London's Southbank Centre, The Sage (Gateshead), and St George's (Bristol). They are sought-after festival artists throughout the UK, Europe, North America, and China.

Since making their U.S. debut in 2011 in Los Angeles and NYC, the Vida Guitar Quartet has appeared on some of North America's most prestigious stages for classical guitar including the Long Island Guitar Festival, the Allegro Guitar Series in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Las Vegas, and were selected by LIVE on Stage for tours in 2015-16. They have been chosen as the keynote performers for the 2015 Guitar Foundation of America in Oklahoma and in 2017 performed at the Kaufmann Concert Hall at the 92Y in NYC as part of their 'Art of the Guitar' Series.

2017 marked the quartet's debut in China as part of the Changsha International Guitar Festival where they were invited to perform at the closing night's concert.

2019 marked Vida's busiest year to date with three visits to the USA and a three week tour of China.

In 2024 Vida performed their debut concert in the Babajanyan concert hall Yerevan in Armenia as part of the Play2 festival of which they are now artists in residence.

The Vida Guitar Quartet have recorded 4 CDs on the BGS label: 'Love, the Magician BGS118', a Spanish fare of Manuel de Falla, Joaquin Turina, and George Bizet's Carmen Suite. 'Rhapsody' featuring works by George Gershwin (Rhapsody in blue), Malcolm Arnold and Adam Gorb. 'The Leaves be Green' is an all English music program of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Edward Elgar, Benjamin Britten, Stephen Dodgson, Timothy Bowers, and 'Warlock and Bachianas', a homage to Johann Sebastian Bach with works by Howard Skempton, Laura Snowdon, Felix Mendelssohn, and Heitor Villa-Lobos, all of whom have been influenced by the great composer, whilst also featuring Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No 3 as a centralising theme.

Vida is currently working on a new recording with Deux Elles records featuring the music of Brahms, Schubert and Grieg due for release in 2025. Future projects include a recording taking its inspiration from the world of musical theatre showcasing arrangements from the iconic 'West Side Story' by Leonard Bernstein.

Vida continue to perform in the UK, Europe, Armenia and North America and are represented by Lisa Sapinkopf Artists.

Vida Guitar Quartet are D'Addario string classical artists.



Manchester Camerata

Tuesday 5 May / 7.30pm

An ensemble from the renowned orchestra present a programme that includes Beethoven's beloved Septet and Anna Meredith's richly textured 'Lanolin'.



Stephen Hough

Thursday 14 May / 7.30pm

Renowned pianist, composer and writer, Sir Stephen Hough returns with a programme that celebrates the art of the short piano piece, with works by Schubert, Brahms, Shoenberg, Beethoven and Schumann.



Welsh National Opera Orchestra | Summertime Soirée

Saturday 6 June / 7.30pm

Join WNO Orchestra, internationally renowned mezzo-soprano Tara Erraught and conductor Harry Ogg for an unforgettable summer concert.



Leon Bosch | I Musicanti feat. Peter Donohoe

Thursday 8 October / 7.30pm

A delightful programme of well-loved chamber music, including Schubert's Trout Quintet – and a hidden gem – performed by some of the UK's most outstanding musicians.

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