



resonus

Cobbett's Legacy

The New Cobbett Prize
for Chamber Music

Berkeley Ensemble

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Sophie Mather *violin*^{1 & 3-6}

Francesca Barritt *violin*^{1-2 & 6}

Dan Shilladay *viola*^{2-3 & 6}

Gemma Wareham *cello*¹⁻⁷

Lachlan Radford *double bass*^{2 & 6-7}

Andrew Watson *bassoon*²

John Slack *clarinet*²⁻⁵

Libby Burgess *piano & celesta*²⁻⁵

About the Berkeley Ensemble:

*'[...] the high quality of the performances by the Berkeley Ensemble, a malleable group which
[...] can adapt itself to different formats and plays as if it were truly inside the music'*

The Daily Telegraph

William Hurlstone (1876–1906)

1. **Phantasie** [7:59]
for string quartet

Barnaby Martin (b. 1991)

2. **Lazarus** [11:47]

A Purcell Garland

Oliver Knussen (1952–2018)

3. ...upon one note [3:24]

George Benjamin (b. 1960)

4. Fantasia 7 [4:06]

Colin Matthews (b. 1946)

5. Fantazia 13 [3:16]

Samuel Wesley Lewis (b. 1991)

6. **Sequenza** [7:34]
for string quintet

Laurence Osborn (b. 1989)

7. **Living Floors** [12:32]
for violoncello and contrabass

Total playing time [50:44]

Cobbett's Legacy

When we founded the Berkeley Ensemble in 2008, one of our aims was to explore the lesser-known works of British chamber music. We envisaged our core repertoire as that of the first half of the twentieth century and personified by Lennox Berkeley, the composer who would eventually lend his name to the group. However, we soon began to feel that 'lesser-known' was a label that could equally apply to contemporary music. In pondering how best to publicise the work of emerging talents – perhaps the least-known and most under-represented composers of all – we realised that a figure from our original, earlier repertoire might provide us with an inspiring example.

Walter Willson Cobbett (1847–1937) was an Edwardian businessman, philanthropist, writer on music and amateur violinist. 'It has been humorously remarked that he has given to commerce what time he could spare from music,' *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* wryly noted in 1927, reflecting his huge contribution to the sphere of chamber music. In 1905 he founded the Cobbett Prize, a competition for young British composers, inspired by the music of the English

Renaissance. In the years that followed, he harnessed the mass media of the time to his cause, commercially printing the winning pieces, writing numerous newspaper articles and founding a periodical, the Chamber Music Supplement, to spread the word as far as possible. Composers today are adept at using social media to spread awareness of their own activities, and yet, why have so few concertgoers heard of even the most successful and Twitter-savvy of young composers?

Several years ago the Berkeley Ensemble ran a composers' workshop and, chatting in the bar after the event, the participants told us that reaching audiences beyond their friends and colleagues was difficult, despite the new means offered by social media. Whilst the numerous established composition competitions were useful, their traditional cash prizes and one-off performances had only limited reach, leaving composers with an impressive CV but few, if any, new listeners. What they also needed was sustained exposure for their work, particularly that offered by commercial recording.

We formulated a plan to engage both the ensemble and the wider listening public with the work of today's young composers: we would found a new Cobbett Prize. Like

our predecessor, we'd do all we could to promote our winners on the concert platform, but our primary vehicle would be a commercial album. Despite the rapid changes that technology has recently wrought on the music industry, it seems that for classical listeners at least, recordings and their associated media are still extremely powerful. Perhaps unfamiliar new styles and languages benefit from the repeated listening that recordings facilitate. Perhaps 'slow' art forms such as classical music do not lend themselves to sound bites. Perhaps the primary audience for such music is simply not engaging with the latest media. Whatever the reason, we wish our finalists the widest possible success, and hope our album will enable the repeated listening that each of the finalists' pieces so richly reward.

William Hurlstone: *Phantasie for String Quartet in A minor*

The winner of Cobbett's inaugural competition was William Hurlstone (1876–1906), unfortunately not now the well-known name Cobbett would have undoubtedly wished of him. On the cusp of a glittering career and poised to reap the rewards of Cobbett's prize, Hurlstone

succumbed to asthma just weeks after he was awarded first prize. Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924), Hurlstone's teacher at the Royal College of Music, would later pronounce the composer to be the most gifted of his students; high praise indeed from the teacher of Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), Gustav Holst (1874–1934) and Frank Bridge (1879–1941).

Hurlstone's *Phantasie* deftly juggles competing and seemingly irreconcilable influences in a compact and virtuosic display of compositional ingenuity. If the half-lit opening recalls Purcell at his most solemn, late Beethoven is similarly near at hand. The development of three principal motifs from this opening section sustains the remainder of the score through the alternating faster and slower sections requested by Cobbett's entry criteria. Hurlstone's final major work stands as a tantalising glimpse of a rare talent cut short; in a chilling pre-echo of the havoc wrought on Europe's young musicians during the Great War, his tombstone was inscribed with a line from Schubert's grave in Vienna: 'Music hath here entombed rich treasure but still fairer hopes'.

Barnaby Martin: *Lazarus*

Lazarus follows the biblical narrative as described in the Gospel according to John,

chapter 11. The resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany from the dead was Jesus's most powerful and documented miracle. It led directly to the gathering of crowds to greet Christ on Palm Sunday ('then many of the Jews which had seen the things which Jesus did, believed in him') and was the catalyst for his condemnation by Caiaphas and the chief priests. Each of the instruments represents a character in the narrative. Most notably, the clarinet is Christ, the cello Lazarus and Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, are represented by the violin and viola respectively. The piece is in one form or another concerned with death; the *Dies Irae* plainchant is used throughout to construct ideas and motifs but is found as a whole at the beginning of the piece in the cello line and in an inverted form in the final clarinet melody. Christ has triumphed over death. (BM)

Purcell arr. various: A Purcell Garland

Cobbett first encountered the viol fantasias of Henry Lawes (1595–1662), Matthew Locke (1621–1677), Henry Purcell (1659–1695) and others at the popular Gresham College lectures given by Frederic Bridge from 1890. These pieces, short and through-composed, often alternating faster and slower

sections, were intended for domestic music making as described by one of their most famous devotees, Samuel Pepys. Cobbett later cited his encounter with this repertoire as the spur to the founding of his competition. He saw in these pieces a fresher, more direct approach that could serve to complement the cerebral, often long multi-movement sonatas of contemporary concert programmes.

Cobbett was not the only musician inspired by the viol repertory of Renaissance England. To mark the tercentenary of Purcell's death in 1995, Oliver Knussen (1952–2018) as the then director of the Aldeburgh Festival commissioned fellow composers George Benjamin (b. 1960) and Colin Matthews (b. 1946) to each arrange a Purcell fantasia for the modern ensemble of violin, cello, clarinet and keyboard, a grouping first popularised by Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*.

Benjamin's reworking is a relatively straight transcription of Purcell's original text, albeit one dominated by the ghostly and rarefied sonorities of celeste and string harmonics. Perhaps his choice of instruments suggests the impossibility of resurrecting the past? Matthews, too, acknowledges the central impossibility of the task he sets himself of completing Purcell's final, unfinished

fantasia. As he later admitted, his completion does not attempt a historically accurate pastiche to extend the piece to a comparable length. Rather, the music spins fantastically off from Purcell's breaking-off before returning, contrite, to a recollection of Purcell's idiom and key at its close. Knussen's own transcription is of Purcell's most celebrated work for viols, the *Fantasia Upon One Note*. The eponymous note is a middle C that sounds throughout every bar of the original fantasia, an ironically simple part to perform that demands great compositional virtuosity of its composer. In Knussen's hands, this tonal centre is imperilled even more than in Purcell's, as the original harmony is progressively blurred, as if recalled in a dream, before the original text re-asserts itself in the closing bars.

Samuel Wesley Lewis: Sequenza

Sequenza is written for the extremely rare instrumental ensemble of string quartet with added bass. The extra instrument is withheld from the extended opening paragraph, a terse, fugue-like accumulation of the higher instruments, thus heightening its eventual appearance at the first climax of the piece. The bass continues to dominate the music in the sparse central section that follows, an unlikely soloist in an

eerie, static landscape. The sequences of the piece's title – ricocheting single notes or gestures that pass in sequence from instrument to instrument, like the hazard lights that adorn motorway roadworks at night – gradually return the music to the febrile world of its opening.

Laurence Osborn: Living Floors

Living Floors takes its name from the term that British paleoanthropologist Mary Leakey (1913–1996) used to describe the dense carpets of bone fragments and crude stone tools found in archaeological sites populated by the first human beings two million years ago. Leakey's 'living floors' were found at the entrances of caves, and are thought to indicate the presence of communal eating sites due to the fact that many of the bone fragments found carried scars and cut-marks left by stone hand-axes. Despite being millions of years old, these fragments possess traces of the glorious dynamism and violence of the first cultures.

The initial ideas for *Living Floors* arose from my imagining the gleam of bone against the dull texture of stone. The piece is also influenced by my imaginings of the hacking and scraping of the latter against the former. This I wished to illustrate mechanically, through the bowing actions

of the players, as well as sonically. (LO)

Notes by Dan Shilladay, except where indicated

Barnaby Martin is an award-winning composer of contemporary classical music based in England. His compositions have been performed widely in the UK and internationally by groups including the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestra of Opera North, the Ligeti Quartet and The Choir of St Paul's Cathedral. In 2018, Barnaby's work for large orchestra, *Quanta*, was selected as the winner of the Toru Takemitsu Composition award; Barnaby is the only composer from the UK to have received first prize in the history of this competition. In 2017, he received his first nomination for a BASCA British Composer Award in 2017 for his cantata, *The Temptations of Christ*.

Samuel Lewis is a composer and pianist currently based in the Midlands. He studied with Richard Whalley at the University of Manchester, graduating with a master's degree in 2014. Sam has enjoyed workshops and performances of his music by numerous contemporary music ensembles, including Quatuor Danel, Psappha and the Berkeley

Ensemble. He was the winner of the New Cobbett Prize for composition in 2014 with his work *Sequenza*. More recently, Sam has worked closely with the bass-baritone Edwin Kaye and has written a song cycle, *Songs of Experience* (texts by William Blake), which Edwin performed in association with the Royal Northern College of Music. Sam is currently working on a chamber opera based on Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*, which is due to be performed in 2020.

Laurence Osborn (b. 1989) is a British composer. His music has been commissioned and/or programmed by the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Mahogany Opera Group, CHROMA, Berkeley Ensemble, Ensemble 360, and The Riot Ensemble among others. His music has been programmed throughout the UK, by the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, St Magnus International Festival, Music in the Round Festival, and at Ulverston International Music Festival. Laurence won the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize in 2017. He was also runner up in the New Cobbett Prize for Composition (2014) and the International Antonín Dvořák Composition Competition (2013) and shortlisted for the ICSM World Music Days (2018). As of 2018, Laurence is studying for a PhD in Composition at King's College London, supervised by Sir George Benjamin.

The Berkeley Ensemble

Patrons: Michael Berkeley CBE & Petroc Trelawny

Hailed as 'an instinctive collective' (*The Strad*) the Berkeley Ensemble was formed with the aim of exploring little-known twentieth- and twenty first-century British chamber music alongside more established repertoire. It now enjoys a busy concert schedule performing throughout the UK and abroad, and is also much in demand for its inspiring work in education.

The ensemble's flexible configuration and collaborative spirit have led to performances with leading musicians including Sir Thomas Allen, Gabriel Prokofiev and Nicholas Daniel. Its recordings have attracted critical acclaim, with Lennox Berkeley: Chamber Works selected by *BBC Music Magazine* as 'Chamber Choice' (September 2015) and Lennox Berkeley: Stabat Mater nominated for a Gramophone Award in 2017 and praised in the magazine's initial review for 'a performance of shimmering intensity'.

The group's innovative and thought-provoking programming has received

official recognition with a Help Musicians UK Emerging Excellence award and support from the PRS for Music Foundation. It is an enthusiastic champion of new music and has commissioned composers including Michael Berkeley, John Woolrich and Misha Mullov-Abbado. A frequent fixture of the festival circuit, the ensemble has performed at the Spitalfields and Cheltenham festivals, and curates the Little Venice Music Festival in London.

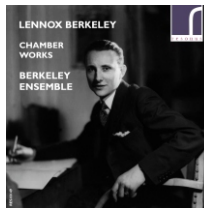
Engaging new audiences, most importantly through education, is central to the ensemble's activities. Most recently, it has collaborated with PRS for Music and Tŷ Cerdd on support schemes for emerging composers. The group is also ensemble-in-residence at the University of Hull and Ibstock Place School, and runs an annual chamber music course in Somerset.

www.berkeleyensemble.co.uk



Photography: Nigel Luckhurst

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