

'And then there were five'

Ollie Heath, Cerys Jones, Chris Murray and myself have been involved in a number of exciting projects around the UK as the Heath Quartet. These have ranged from seventeen Beethoven quartets in six days to live recordings of Michael Tippett's five quartets, performing in cages suspended from the ceiling of the London Coliseum for ENO's Fidelio and, more recently, recording Bartok's six quartets in two live concerts. Besides sore fingers, a few arguments and sleep deprivation these epic undertakings have given us focus and an immersive, singular intention. And this summer we're about to do it again. Twice.

In July we are pairing the six late Beethoven quartets with readings of TS Eliot's 'Four Quartets' in four concerts at the Ryedale festival in Yorkshire. Until now we have paired just Beethoven's emotionally draining Op. 132 with a reading of one of the T.S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets' and it has been a hit with audiences. Ryedale has this year invited Jeremy Irons to do the reading of all the 'Four Quartets', the draw of celebrity and quality outside of our field means an exciting expansion and diversification of our normal quartet audience. My quartet is at an age now where we are revisiting repertoire - this September it will be fifteen years since I sat down with Ollie to hack through Mozart A Major in my first week of music college. Even though we've performed the complete Beethoven cycle three times and they are a known quantity, the late quartets present a deep experience and a stamina challenge to us and audiences.

Three weeks later we are playing Mozart's ten 'Celebrated' quartets and five viola quintets in five concerts at the Kilkenny festival in Ireland. These will be second visits to both festivals over the summer, which means developing existing relationships with expectant audiences over the cycles. Quintets always feel like a special event to me, the repertoire is usually miraculous and all players seem to put their best foot forward due to its rarity and impermanence. I personally feel that for another instrument to join a string quartet, another viola – yes I am totally and unashamedly biased – is the most fulfilling and successful in terms of corporate sound. One's awareness of the fifth player is heightened as you probably don't have an existing performing relationship or rapport, so the result is everyone listening inwards to the middle of the group, which is a more intimate, generative, supporting and communicative experience to share on stage. I've had the (occasionally intimidating) pleasure of playing viola quintets with some of my heroes and this year it is our friend Atte Kilpeläinen who is joining our all-Mozart madness. We met at Heidelberg Frühling a few years ago, a festival where Atte was performing with Meta4, his own dynamic quartet. Part of the ethos of the festival was an element of cross-pollination, so Atte joined our group for Brahms' G Major quintet. He was by far the most enjoyable part of the festival for us after a few mis-fires in terms of quintet/sextet pairing, incredibly easy to get on with, work hard with and feel comfortable with on stage after a risky few days of 'speed dating'.

I'm eager to start rehearsing with Atte in the coming weeks, and curious how the warmth and gentle depth of his enlarged Storioni will sound with my strong and sonorous modern Christoph Gotting viola. We rehearse in a few places, one of which being my house in Northwest London. Here Ollie, Cerys, Chris and I are regularly fuelled by cups of tea and the occasional cake, and my dog Logan is on call as our harshest critic. He'll sleep through almost anything, but at a slight deviation in tempo or an intonation slip, he's been known to get up off the couch and turn on the metronome in disgust. He is equally effective as a tension-diffusing therapy animal for when we're feeling tired, overworked or grumpy. I hope he's ready for our summer.

Gary Pomeroy

30th May 2016



Above: Gary practising with critique from Logan

Biography

Born in South Africa, Gary Pomeroy studied the viola as an ABRSM international scholar at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, and went on to study chamber music at the Reina Sofia in Madrid. His major influences have included working with Mark Knight, Isabel Deplazes-Charisius, Thomas Riebl, Alasdair Tait and Christopher Rowland.

Gary is a member of the Heath Quartet, who have recently been awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society Young Artist Award and recorded the complete quartets of Michael Tippett for Wigmore Live to critical acclaim. Releases of the complete Bela Bartok quartets and Tchaikovsky quartets for Harmonia Mundi are set for the near future. They regularly appear at major venues across Europe and the USA and have broadcast on French, German, Austrian, Algerian, American and BBC radio. Gary has recently recorded the Dvorak piano quartets with the London Bridge Trio on Champs Hill Records.

Gary has enjoyed a wide range of collaborative projects in music education, including coaching the Kuumba Youth Orchestra, teaching primary school learners as part of a 3 year project for Wigmore Learning. He has taught viola on the Pro Corda Senior course, worked as a Junior Fellow in Chamber Music at the Royal Northern College of Music and as a Senior Fellow at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

