



**Saturday 15 July 2023**

**12pm – 1pm All Hallows Church, Tillington**

**5pm – 6pm St Giles' Church, Graffham**

**Royal Academy of Music: The Asaka Quartet**

**Iona McDonald**                      *violin*  
**Eriol Guo Yu**                        *violin*  
**Susie Xin He**                        *viola*  
**Jonathan Ho Man Fong** *cello*

## **PROGRAMME NOTES**

**String Quartet No.1 in E minor 'Bologna'**

**Frank Bridge (1879-1941)**

- 1 Adagio – Allegro appassionato
- 2 Adagio molto
- 3 Allegretto grazioso – Animato
- 4 Allegro agitato – Allegro moderato – Adagio molto

At the outset of his career Frank Bridge established himself through a series of prize-winning chamber works demonstrating impeccable craftsmanship and a wholly idiomatic understanding of string instruments. In the year W.W. Cobbett (of Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music) set up an annual prize in 1905 for a series of chamber works, Bridge submitted a Phantasie String Trio, but won first prize two years later for his Phantasie Piano Trio.

In between, his String Quartet No. 1 was written in 1906 as a competition piece for the Accademia Filarmonica, Bologna (hence its monicker), and was first performed three years later at the Wigmore Hall. Cast in four movements, the first is notable for its alternating turbulence and tenderness, an emotional ambivalence underlined by incisive rhythms and a rapt lyricism, both generated from the chromatic introduction. The intensity of the closing bars is swept aside for a wistful 'Adagio molto', its pensive mood offset by an animated central panel. Playful rhythms enliven the 'Scherzo', a buoyant movement comprising some of Bridge's most felicitous invention. A more passionate mood occupies the finale where the first movement's main theme reappears in the final bars to signal a sombre close.

**Bignor Hill (world premiere)**

**Ned Bigham (born 1966)**

Standing proud on the distant southern skyline from Petworth and towering above its eponymous hamlet, Bignor Hill rises as a steep wooded escarpment on the north side, up to a height of 740 feet, and slopes gracefully down to Madehurst on the south. There is a Celtic legend that a dragon had its lair on top of the hill and its remains can be seen in

the folds of the ground. The narrow, twisting lane that runs from the col below the summit down to Bignor village forms a treacherous but exciting toboggan run on the rare occasion of snow and was the scene of happy childhood memories, referred to by my father as the 'Cresta Run'. We descended on creaking, wooden sleds covered in cobwebs from the 1950s and on farmers' fertiliser sacks for the better padded.

The hill's gentle ridge boasts one of Sussex's finest panoramas, East to Amberley Castle, North to Barlavington, Sutton, Bignor and its park, West to St Michael's, Burton Park and South to the sea, in the far distance the Isle of Wight. The wind whistles through your hair and, in the Left Hanger wood and Egg Bottom Coppice, there is a chorus of birdsong and animal chatter. As a composer, it has provided me with a vivid source of inspiration, and the piece I have composed is in two parts. The first celebrates its energy and if it were set anywhere it would be in Bignortail Wood, perhaps walking up towards the summit. The second alludes to its tranquillity and natural harmony and could be set at the Toby Stone just below its summit. If you close your eyes I hope you might imagine you are there in the midst of its wonders.

Ned Bigham, 2023

### **String Quartet No.1 in G major**

**Arnold Bax (1883-1953)**

- 1 Allegretto simplice
- 2 Lento e molto espressivo
- 3 Rondo: Allegro vivace

Like Bridge, Arnold Bax belonged to the generation of English composers that included Vaughan Williams, Holst and John Ireland. While his reputation rests on his symphonic poems (notably *Tintagel*) and seven symphonies, he made numerous contributions to chamber music including four string quartets that span over thirty years of artistic endeavour. His String Quartet in G major is an affable work belonging to 1918. Though seemingly a world apart from the ravages of the Great War, the quartet's serenade-like first movement has a sunny countenance. Rhythmically jaunty and melodically rich, it brings reminiscences of Dvořák. When Elgar scanned the work following the offer of its dedication, he is said to have 'liked the look of it'. The emotional heart of the Quartet is in the elegiac and beautifully crafted slow movement, its atmospheric central panel possibly evoking memories of friends lost in the war. Bax's love of all things Celtic appear in the breezy finale where two dance-like melodies yield to a folk tune of surpassing beauty that may belong to 'The Lament of Fanaid Grove'. Whatever the provenance, its inclusion here supports Bax's confession of being 'a brazen romantic'.

David Truslove, 2023

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