

Seaford Music Society

Sunday 6th June 2021 at 3.00 pm and 6.00 pm

Sebastian Comberti (cello) and **Maggie Cole** (piano)

Born in London, **Sebastian Comberti** studied in Italy with Amedeo Baldovino, and later with Derek Simpson and Sidney Griller at the Royal Academy of Music, from where he graduated in 1977. In 1976 he became a founder member of the Bochmann Quartet, giving concerts throughout the British Isles and in Europe.

In 1983 Sebastian was appointed principal cello with the London Mozart Players, with whom he has since appeared frequently as soloist, as well as being an active member of the LMP Chamber Ensemble. A keen interest in historically informed performance has resulted in participation with a great many period instrument groups, frequently appearing as principal cello with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and soloist with the Hanover Band. Research into early cello repertoire has led to several recitals being recorded by the BBC.

As a soloist for the CPO label he has recorded four CDs of the Sinfonia Concertantes of JC Bach, while as a member of several chamber groups he has recorded for CRD, EMI, Harmonia Mundi, Hyperion, Meridian, Phoenix and RCA. In April 2001 Sebastian founded Cello Classics, a label devoted to recordings of rare repertoire and artists, for which he has himself released CDs of hitherto unknown sonatas by Boccherini, quartets for 4 cellos, early 19th Century sonatas with fortepiano, and discs of Sonatas by Stephen Paxton and concertos by Haydn and Zumsteeg with the OAE.

Since 1978 he has been a founder member of the 2-cello quintet Divertimenti, recording for Hyperion, Dutton Sound and Cello Classics. With Maggie Cole and Kati Debretzeni he forms part of Trio Goya. Their 2018 CD of Beethoven Op.1 Trios has been received with great acclaim.

American born **Maggie Cole** is professor of fortepiano at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and teaches early keyboards at Dartington International Summer School. She enjoys an international musical life playing and recording on harpsichord, fortepiano and modern piano. She is best known through numerous recitals on BBC Radio 3 and appearances at leading British festivals. Abroad, she has performed in venues from Seattle to India. She also performs regularly with Kati Debretzeni and Sebastian Comberti in her fortepiano trio Trio Goya, and with the Nash Ensemble, Britten Sinfonia and her USA-based group, the Sarasa Chamber Ensemble, with whom she has extended her love of teaching into the development of a programme bringing music, improvisation and poetry into facilities for youth offenders.

Maggie's recordings on harpsichord include Bach's Goldberg Variations, Poulenc's Concert Champêtre, Boccherini Sonatas with Steven Isserlis, Bach flute sonatas with Philippa Davies and the complete Bach violin sonatas with Catherine Mackintosh. On fortepiano she has recorded 'Mozartiana' with Sebastian Comberti, and her CD of Haydn trios with Trio Goya was followed by a recording of the Opus 1 Beethoven trios, released in 2018.



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Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Cello Sonata No.3 in A major, Op.69

- I *Allegro ma non tanto*
- II *Scherzo: Allegro molto*
- III *Adagio cantabile – Allegro vivace*

Beethoven's *A major Cello Sonata* dates from 1808, a period of great musical activity, when some of his greatest works poured from his pen and a number of the courts of Europe were vying for his services. Always astute with money matters, he sought simultaneous contracts for publication of many of his works, in more than one country, and it was the assistance he received from Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, an amateur cellist and secretary to the War Department, which earned him the dedication of this sonata.

Of the five sonatas for cello and piano, the *A major* is the only one dating from Beethoven's middle-period and it is deservedly popular with both players and public. He had no models to follow in this form and the unconventionality of the genre, together with the problems of achieving a satisfactory balance between the wide range of the piano and the middle register of the cello, brought about compositional problems well illustrated in the autograph score, where there are massive alterations and a redistribution of the melodic material.

The *Sonata* opens softly, with the cello alone, creating a truly magical effect. This opening *Allegro* is in sonata form, with moments of pathos in the development. The busy *Scherzo*, with its tied-note syncopations, is rhythmically complex. Beethoven's reluctance to write a true slow movement may seem surprising in view of the singing qualities of the cello exploited by later composers, but, despite the exquisite theme in the piano, and the tender reply of the cello, the introductory nature of the *Adagio cantabile* soon becomes evident as it leads naturally into the buoyant and brilliant finale.

Programme note by John Dalton, courtesy of Making Music

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Stucke im Volkston [Five Pieces in Folk Style], Op.102

- I *Mit Humor [with humour]*
- II *Langsam [slowly]*
- III *Nicht schnell [not fast]*
- IV *Nicht zu rasch [not too quickly]*
- V *Stark und markiert [strong and marked]*

Among a number of important works that flowed from Schumann's pen in 1849, marking a general – if temporary – improvement in his physical and mental health, is this set of five delightful miniatures for cello and piano. His move to Düsseldorf, where he took up the conductorship of the local orchestra, stimulated him to experiment with different instrumental combinations in his chamber music. These combinations involved not only the cello but also the clarinet, oboe, horn and viola. The set for cello and piano are among his most relaxed creations and it is perhaps this fact that gives rise to the subtitle *im Volkston* (in folk style).

The pieces follow a simple scheme of related keys: A minor – F major – A minor – D major – A minor. The set contains moments of a strange, sad beauty reinforced, perhaps, by the composer's preoccupation with A minor.

Programme note courtesy of Making Music

Kenneth V JONES (1924-2020)

Two Contrasts for Solo Cello

Until his death last December, Kenneth had lived for over 25 years in Bishopstone Village, Seaford. He was a member of Seaford Music Society, and came to particular prominence at our concert in November 2019, when he gave a highly entertaining interview prior to the performance by Capriccio Ensemble of his *String Quartet No.1*.

Born in Bletchley, Buckinghamshire, Kenneth was to become a scholar at King's School, Canterbury. This was followed by a 6-month RAF-sponsored course in music and philosophy at Queen's College, Oxford, and, from 1947, 3 years at the Royal College of Music, of which he was later made a professor in 1958. He was a composer (particularly noted for his work in films, including *The Siege of Pinchgut*, *Ferry to Hong Kong* and *Ten Seconds to Hell*), was founder and original conductor of The Wimbledon Symphony Orchestra, and acted as one of the Governors of Rokeby School, helping to raise the £50,000 that was needed to save it from closure in 1966. Among his other achievements, Kenneth coached Ava Gardner to play the piano, and taught James Galway to sight-read!

Two Contrasts for Solo Cello was played at Kenneth's funeral, and was recently included in an online streamed concert, but we believe that today's performance will be its first public live performance. The work will be introduced by Sebastian Comberti.

David POPPER (1843-1913)

Two Pieces for Cello and Piano, Op.52

Popper was born in Prague, and studied cello at the Prague Conservatory. As a professional cellist he toured Europe extensively, and was at various times Chamber Virtuoso in the court of Prince von Hohenzollern-Hechingen in Löwenberg; principal cellist at the Wiener Hofoper (Vienna Court Opera); a teacher at the Conservatory in Budapest; and a member of the Hellmesberger Quartet and the Budapest Quartet. In 1864 he premiered Robert Volkmann's Cello Concerto in A minor, with Hans von Bülow (who was son-in-law of Franz Liszt) conducting the Berlin Philharmonic, and on more than one occasion performed chamber music with Johannes Brahms, including the premiere of Brahms's Piano Trio No.3.

There are over 80 works in the catalogue of Popper's compositions, most of them for cello and either piano or orchestra, and *The Oxford Companion to Music (Tenth Edition)* informs us that his compositions for cello "have had great currency". However, Martin Rummel, an Austrian cellist and academic, who is working on bringing Popper's work into the mainstream of classical music, admits that "most works by David Popper are still in the dark as far as the history of their composition, the circumstances of their first performances and the place in Popper's own repertoire are concerned".

The work will be introduced by the performers.

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Twelve Variations for Cello and Piano in F major on "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen" from Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte", Op.66

Mozart's *The Magic Flute* is said to have been Beethoven's favourite opera, and accordingly he wrote two sets of variations for cello and piano, each on one of its best known themes. The *F major Variations* are based on the second Act aria *Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen*, in which the comic bird-catcher Papageno yearns for a maiden, or a woman to be his own, otherwise he will die of grief.

It is almost certain that the *Ein Mädchen Variations* were written during the tour that Beethoven made with Prince Lichnowsky in 1796. During their stop in Berlin the two *Op. 5 Sonatas* were written for the cello-playing Friedrich William II. Beethoven played the sonatas with the King's resident cellist, Jean Pierre Dupont, receiving for his efforts a gold snuff-box "fit for an ambassador" and filled with *louis d'ors*. It is likely that the same duo gave the first performance of the *Variations* at about the same time.

The work opens with the piano stating the theme, supported by the cello in its middle register. Twelve variations follow. The piano also goes on to take the first variation and then the cello makes a sweeping, virtuosic statement in its higher register in the second. Long, sustained cello notes act as foils for the pianist's left hand display in the third. Beethoven tests both players as the work proceeds with an all-staccato piece which steadily increases in intensity in Variation 8, and the playful, syncopated dance of No.9, with its leaping quavers across the main beats. No. 10 is the requisite variation in the minor key with a suggestion of a funeral march. In No. 11 the cello sings a dour tune, sinking to its lowest notes, and with a tragic sounding coda leads to the joyful final variation, full of life and vigour. At the end of this variation a brilliant extended coda is added, building to a climax before evaporating to nothing at the conclusion.

Programme note by John Dalton, courtesy of Making Music

Our next concert

Sunday 11th July 2021, 3.00 pm, at Seaford Baptist Church, Belgrave Road, Seaford
Repeated at 6.00 pm if there is sufficient demand

We shall be joined by our good friends the **London Mozart Players Chamber Ensemble**, who will perform:

Mozart: Quartet for Oboe and Strings in F major, K.370

Britten: Phantasy Quartet for Oboe and String Trio, Op.2

Beethoven: Variations from 'The Magic Flute' (the companion piece to today's finale!)

Beethoven: Eyeglass Duo

Seat prices, booking arrangements and Covid precautions will be the same as for today's concert. Seats must be booked in advance, there will be no admission to anybody who has not pre-booked.

Please book your place as soon as you can, so that we shall know if the evening performance will be needed. If you require any further information, please ask one of the stewards, or contact us by email at treasurer@seafordmusicsociety.com

Our next season

We are planning a season of concerts from October 2021 to May 2022. Members of Seaford Music Society who paid their subscriptions for 2019-20 remain members until our AGM in July 2021, and will receive full details of the 2021-22 season at the AGM, or by post as soon as possible afterwards.

If you are not a member, and would like to be informed about the 2021-22 season, please leave your contact details at the desk by the entrance, or contact us by email at treasurer@seafordmusicsociety.com.

Our Annual General Meeting

This will be held on Sunday 18th July. It will be a short, functional meeting, without any refreshments or other social element. A minimum of ten members need to be present in order to form a quorum, and, in response to an earlier request, a sufficient number of members have indicated that they expect to attend. If you would like to attend but have not yet told us, please do so immediately, to ensure that we do not exceed government-imposed regulations regarding indoor gatherings.