

## ENSEMBLE 360

Premieres on Saturday 15 May 1.00pm  
Filmed in the Crucible Studio, Sheffield

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**MATTHEW HUNT** clarinet  
**BENJAMIN NABARRO** violin  
**CLAUDIA AJMONE-MARSAN** violin  
**RUTH GIBSON** viola  
**GEMMA ROSEFIELD** cello

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**HOWELLS** Rhapsodic Quintet  
**MOZART** Clarinet Quintet K581

### **HERBERT HOWELLS (1892–1983)**

#### **Rhapsodic Quintet for Clarinet and Strings Op.31**

Lento, ma appassionato – A tempo, tranquillo – Più mosso, inquieto – Doppio movimento ritmico, e non troppo allegro – Più elato – Meno mosso – Lento, assai tranquillo – Più adagio

Herbert Howells is probably best remembered for his church music (including the famous hymn tune 'All my hope on God is founded' as well as several outstanding settings of service music) and for his choral masterpiece 'Hymnus paradisi'. But he was also a gifted composer for instruments and wrote a good deal of chamber music at the start of his career. The Rhapsodic Quintet was completed in June 1919 and Howells himself said that there was 'a mystic feeling about the whole thing'. Still, mystic feelings didn't come without some serious hard work, and the Howells scholar Paul Spicer has drawn attention to an entry in the composer's diary where he noted that the quintet had involved quite a lot of preparatory thinking. Howells wrote of his 'long ponderous thoughts on problems of musical form ... hours spent in an easy-chair, fire-gazing, form-thinking'. The 'form-thinking' was clearly productive, since this beautifully written quintet for clarinet and strings in one movement appears to flow effortlessly from one idea to the next, as well as having overall coherence. This was an early work – Howells had only recently finished his studies at the Royal College of Music with Stanford and Charles Wood – but his handling of the instruments shows tremendous assurance. Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music makes particular mention of this, describing the work as having a 'sensitive appreciation of instrumental

needs', but there is more to it than that, since Howells also shows a great gift for unfolding long, lyrical melodies, and contrasting these with more capricious ideas. It's this combination of fluent and idiomatic writing with memorable thematic material that led Christopher Palmer, in his biography of Howells, to call the Rhapsodic Quintet 'an outstanding achievement'.

### **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)**

#### **Clarinet Quintet in A K581**

Allegro  
Larghetto  
Menuetto  
Allegretto con variazioni

The Clarinet Quintet was completed on 29 September 1789 and written for Mozart's friend Anton Stadler (1753–1812). The first performance took place a few months later at a concert in Vienna's Burgtheater on 22 December 1789, with Stadler as the soloist in a programme where the premiere of the Clarinet Quintet was a musical interlude, sandwiched between the two parts of Vincenzo Righini's cantata 'The Birth of Apollo', performed by "more than 180 persons".

From the start, Mozart is at his most daringly beautiful: the luxuriant voicing of the opening string chords provides a sensuously atmospheric musical springboard for the clarinet's opening flourish. The rich sonority of the Clarinet Quintet is quite unlike that of any other chamber music by Mozart, but it does have something in common with his opera *Così fan tutte* (premiered in January 1790), on which he

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was working at the same time. In particular, the slow movement of the Quintet, with muted strings supporting the clarinet, has a quiet rapture that recalls the trio 'Soave sia il vento' (with muted strings, and prominent clarinet parts as well as voices) in *Così*. The finale of the Quintet is a Theme and Variations, which begins with folk-like charm, then turns to more melancholy reflection before ending in a spirit of bucolic delight.

All notes © Nigel Simeone 2021

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## ENSEMBLE 360

Ensemble 360 has gained an enviable reputation across the UK not only for the quality and integrity of its playing, but also for its ability to communicate the music to a range of different audiences. Formed in 2005, 11 musicians of international standing came together to take up residency in Sheffield with Music in the Round, establishing a versatile group of five string players, five wind players and a pianist. The musicians believe that concerts should be informal, friendly and relaxed occasions, and perform 'in the round' wherever possible. Critical acclaim has greeted all the group's CDs to date: Mozart and Spohr (ASV Gold), Beethoven and Poulenc (Nimbus Alliance).

Ensemble 360 has performed at many of the leading festivals and venues in England, including Wigmore Hall, National Centre for Early Music, Bath and Buxton International Music Festivals. It appears regularly on BBC Radio 3 and at a number of small-scale venues nationally with Music in the Round. Ensemble 360 is at the heart of chamber music in South Yorkshire, appearing regularly in Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster as part of Music in the Round's concert series, and is central to the nine-day Sheffield Chamber Music Festival in May each year.

## MUSIC IN THE ROUND

Music in the Round is the leading national promoter of chamber music. For over 35 years we have been bringing people and music closer together through our friendly and informative style of 'in the round' performances, touring to numerous venues around the country as well as presenting two concert series and the Sheffield Chamber Music Festival each year at our home venue, the Crucible Studio. Our concerts are characterised by passion, excellence and proximity, and even in these challenging times of a global pandemic we have been striving to connect people through music by presenting socially-distanced live concerts and creating films featuring our musicians to enjoy online.

## THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING SHEFFIELD CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The Sheffield Chamber Music Festival is the highlight of the year for all of us, so although it's online again, we have put everything into creating a digital event that everyone can come together to enjoy, across Sheffield, South Yorkshire, the UK, and even the world!

Your generosity in the last year has made it possible for us to continue with our aim to bring people closer to music. It is thanks to you, our Friends, supporters and audiences, that we are able to bring you such a full Festival programme this May.

We are not charging for any of the events, but we are relying on your generosity to keep us going. For over a year now, musicians have been unable to work properly and earn a decent living. After facing such a challenging time for so long they need us more than ever. Any support that you give us makes a difference to them. **Please donate as you feel: every single gift makes a difference.**