

PROGRAMME NOTES

Gustav Mahler

Johannes Brahms

Martin Messmer

Gustav Mahler

In 1875 at the age of 15, Mahler enrolled as a student at the *Conservatorium für Musik und darstellende Kunst der Gesellschaft für Musikfreunde in Wien*. His teachers included Julius Epstein (piano), and he was particularly influenced by Anton Bruckner. A year later, with the first movement of his Piano Quartet in A minor, Mahler won a competition for composition. The Mahler expert, Constantin Floros, writes of this work:

"The world of music has long been familiar with his astonishingly precocious cantata, *Das klagende Lied*, of 1878-80, but listeners are less likely to be aware of the fact that he developed a lively interest in chamber music at least from the age of 14, since the majority of these early works were later destroyed by Mahler himself. Fortunately, the opening movement and part of a Scherzo from a piano quartet have survived from 1876. Anyone hearing this movement for the first time will be surprised not only at the technical skill, compositional logic and sense of form of its 16-year-old composer, but also at the originality and expressivity of the music. Several features such as the often impassioned tone, the predilection for violent contrasts, the sense of climax and, not least, the *morendo* ending are already typical of the later Mahler."

Johannes Brahms

The Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25, composed between 1855 and 1859, is one of Brahms' first masterpieces. It was first performed on 16 November, 1861 at a Musical Evening in the *Kleiner Wörnerscher Saal in Hamburg*, with Clara Schumann at the piano.

The work is both traditional and progressive. The opening Allegro, initially introduced as a main movement in sonata form with an exposition and development, has an open repeat, where the second theme no longer appears in its original form. The Intermezzo (originally a Scherzo) "flits away into the night, finding no peace even in the usually calm Trio" (Georg Günther).

Both the melodious third movement and especially the folkloristic leanings of the Finale have helped make the G minor quartet the most popular of Brahms' cycle of three piano quartets (including those in A major, Op. 26 and in C minor, Op. 60).

Martin Messmer

M. Messmer, born in 1959 in Heidelberg, studied Piano, Cello and Composition (with H. Schäfer) at the *Musikhochschule Heidelberg-Mannheim* and then Composition with Giselher Klebe in *Detmold*. Since 1983 he has had several compositions commissioned, recorded for the radio and staged regular performances. He began lecturing in Music Theory at the *Musikhochschule Heidelberg-Mannheim* and at the *Hochschule für Kirchenmusik Heidelberg* in 1986. In 1987 his composition *Eigendrehung, 3 Radierungen* for violin and piano won second prize in the Mannheim Mozart Competition (a first prize was not awarded). He was holder of a scholarship at the *Academie Schloß Solitude in Stuttgart* in 1992/1993. He has worked with and premiered works with the Balanescu Quartet London, John Kenny, Robyn Schulkowsky, Ensemble Recherche Freiburg, Ex Voco, and the *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, among others; he also had a work commissioned for the *Tage für Neue Musik in Stuttgart* in 1993. In 1995 he became Professor for Music Theory at the *Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hannover*.

Of his work *Phase/Plasma 2*, Messmer writes:

"The composition *Phase/Plasma 2* was written in March and April 1996, at the suggestion of Prof. Hans J. Specht. It will be premiered on 21 May, 1996 on the occasion of the conference *Quark Matter 96* in Heidelberg.

Phase/Plasma 2 has been written for oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, cello, double bass and piano and is the sequel to an earlier work, *Plasma*, composed in 1993. Conversations about and discussions on quantum physics and elementary particle physics were the influences behind the formation process of the composition on both a technical and aesthetic level.

Two different states of subjectively experienced statics oppose each other as dialectical poles. A small, very fast-moving sound surface is perceived in a similar vein to barely moving, fixed objects. The absence of simple melodies, where the relationships between the velocities (rhythm) appear in conventional quantities and where movement only exists in extremely fast or very slow velocities, demands another form of perception. A sound surface created by several rhythmic planes superimposed upon one another seems chaotic (which it, in fact, is; the individual sound events in such structural spheres, spaced horizontally along an imaginary melodic line, could only be realised in absolute perfection by a computer). As this sound surface is created by interweaving previously-defined single lines, the composer also has to take the (albeit very slight) influence of chance into account.

As previously mentioned, melodic developments in such a field cannot be perceived; rather, through the gradual change of field density, complexity and velocity, a very slow, almost virtual time structure sets in, which in this way corresponds with the parts of actual statics. For this I have made use of the special forms of the techniques of so-called *minimal music*.

I tried to obtain a transmission of the fluctuating and rhythmically almost indistinct principle of the moving static parts onto the linear (horizontal) plane by quarter-tone scordatura of the strings (the stringed instruments are not used with their normal tuning; the individual strings have to be "untuned" in a specifically-defined way). Microtonal impurities are thus formed, in which, for example, linear fragments are constantly surrounded by slightly "out", "wrong" notes. It thus becomes impossible to perceive the exact frequency of the note, yet it is possible that roughness effects and beat frequencies are felt.

To be able to realise these sound effects in a precise manner, it was necessary to eliminate all subjective, namely human, components (such as slightly inaccurate playing, vibrato, etc.). Consequently, the strings only play open strings and harmonics."