

# ENSEMBLE 360

Monday 27th April, 7.30pm



## THE LARK ASCENDING

**ROBERT PLANE** clarinet  
**BENJAMIN NABARRO** violin  
**NATALIE KLOUDA** violin  
**RACHEL ROBERTS** viola  
**GEMMA ROSEFIELD** cello

**I HOLST** Phantasy String Quartet (10')  
**BRITTEN** Three Divertimenti for String Quartet (10')  
**HOLBROOKE** Eilean Shona (4')  
**HOWELLS** Phantasy String Quartet (13')  
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**PURCELL** Three-part Fantasias (8')  
**HARRISON** Clarinet Quintet (12')  
**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS** (arr. Gerigk) The Lark Ascending (15')

### **IMOGEN HOLST (1907-1984)** **Phantasy String Quartet**

Imogen Holst composed her Phantasy String Quartet in 1928 (although it wasn't premiered until several years after her death, in 2007). The piece typifies the composer's early style, blending the English pastoral tradition with her own unique talents for melodic development, contrapuntal writing, and idiosyncratic quartet-textures. It won the Cobbett Prize – an award founded by the wealthy industrialist Walter Willson Cobbett to encourage composers to write 'Phantasies', works of one movement in the tradition of 16th and 17th-Century English 'fancies', 'fantasies', or 'fantasias'. These were short instrumental works which, like Holst's, did not adhere to strict forms but rather developed in their own imaginative and unexpected ways. Beginning with lush pastoral harmonies, Holst's Phantasy transitions fluidly through episodes of meditative introspection and spirited energy.

### **BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913 - 1976)** **Three Divertimenti for String Quartet**

I. March. Allegro maestoso  
II. Waltz. Allegretto  
III. Burlesque. Presto

Britten planned these movements as part of a five-movement Quartetto serioso with a subtitle from Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*: "Go play, boy, play!" Eventually he settled on a work in three movements, and the first performance was given by the Stratton Quartet at the Wigmore Hall on 25 February 1936. The audience response was chilly and a hurt Britten withdrew the *Three Divertimenti*, which were only published after his death. His brilliant gift for idiomatic quartet writing is already apparent in this early work –

from the arresting rhythms and textures of the March to the beguiling central Waltz, and the driving energy of the closing Burlesque.

### **JOSEPH HOLBROOKE (1878–1958)** **Eilean Shona for Clarinet and String Quartet**

Joseph Holbrooke was a curious and sometimes infuriating character. His chamber music concerts would often include oddly aggressive notes for the audience, presenting – as he put it – 'music to an apathetic public' after which he 'hopes to receive as few blows as possible (with the usual financial loss) in return.' Setting his personal flaws to one side, he was capable of producing fine music, of which Eilean Shona is a brief and very attractive example. Eilean Shona is a small island off the west coast of Scotland and Holbrooke's short work for clarinet and string quartet (reworked from a song for voice and piano) is haunting and evocative.

### **HERBERT HOWELLS (1892–1983)** **Phantasy String Quartet, Op. 25**

In 1905, W.W. Cobbett launched a competition to breathe new life into British chamber music by reviving the 'Phantasy', an archaic form which Henry Purcell had made his own in about 1680. In the 1917 competition, second prize (of 10 guineas) was awarded to Herbert Howells for his Phantasy String Quartet Op. 25. In Cobbett's *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, he wrote that in Howells's Quartet 'contrives in the single movement of a phantasy to let his themes pass through a series of moods which are equivalent, in miniature, to the fully expressed phrases of a four-movement work'. The result is a quartet that has moments of striking beauty.

## HENRY PURCELL (1659–1695)

### Three-Part Fantasias 1, 2 & 3

Henry Purcell was one of the most celebrated English composers of the Baroque era. Among his remarkable works is a series of Fantasias (or Fancies), composed in 1680 when Purcell was only 21 years old. Showcasing his profound skill with contrapuntal writing – in which each of the instrument’s melodic lines work both independently and as part of the musical-whole – the Fantasias are considered among the finest examples of the form and are regarded by many to be the ‘jewel in the crown of English consort music’. This wasn’t always the case, however. When Purcell composed these works, the Fantasia was quite unfashionable. King Charles II is said to have had ‘an utter detestation of Fancies’. Out of favour in the Royal court, Purcell’s Fantasias were therefore likely intended to be performed in domestic settings. Originally written for three viols, they are here transcribed for string trio (violin, viola, and cello).

## PAMELA HARRISON (1915-1990)

### Clarinet Quintet

I. Allegro moderato

II. Lento

III. Allegro molto e agitato

Pamela Harrison is a lesser-known English composer of the 20th Century. Born in Orpington, Greater London in 1915, Harrison produced many of her works during the Second World War. She studied at the Royal Northern College of Music under Australian pianist Arthur Benjamin, and regularly performed her own piano compositions as a student. Her Clarinet Quintet (1956) was one of three pieces inspired by and written for her friend Jack Brymer, who was one of the most renowned clarinetists of the 20th Century. The opening *Allegro moderato* begins in a jaunty manor, but quickly gives way to an unsettled feeling in both the rhythm and the melody. The *Lento* movement is spacious and full of emotional intensity, with the clarinet line floating above a static string accompaniment. The final movement, the *Allegro molto e agitato* sees the return of the opening theme, riding a flurry of notes in the accompanying parts. Ensemble 360’s Robert Plane has championed Harrison’s music and was responsible for the world premiere recordings of her clarinet chamber pieces.

## RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872–1958)

### The Lark Ascending

Vaughan Williams began *The Lark Ascending* before the outbreak of the First World War, taking his inspiration from George Meredith’s 1881 poem of the same name. But he set this ‘Romance’ aside during the war and only finished it in 1920. The violinist Marie Hall gave the first performance of the original version for violin and piano in Shirehampton Public Hall (a district of Bristol) on 15 December 1920. Vaughan Williams dedicated the work to her, and she went on to give the premiere of the orchestral version six months later, when it was conducted by the young Adrian Boult at a concert in the Queen’s Hall in London. Free, serene and dream-like, this is idyllic music of rare and fragile beauty, here arranged in an intimate setting for string quartet.

Programme notes © Nigel Simeone

## 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.

[www.ensemble360.co.uk](http://www.ensemble360.co.uk)

## MUSIC IN THE ROUND

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Walter Rabi