

Britten Sinfonia

Pittville Pump Room

Friday 4 July

Deborah Pritchard	Time Colour (Cheltenham 2025 commission, world premiere)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Clarinet Quintet in A major, K.581
Interval	
Felix Mendelssohn	String Octet in E flat major, Op. 20

About the Programme

Deborah Pritchard Time Colour (Cheltenham 2025 commission, world premiere)

Composer's Note:

This piece is written to celebrate 80 years of the Cheltenham Festival and the end of WW2 with peace in Europe. It's also inspired by the quote by Carol Rovelli 'We are time, we are this space' - the idea that history doesn't exist in a vacuum and we are all connected by the human condition.

I'm also inspired by my grandfather who designed plane wings during WW2, so there is a feeling of flight about it too, the passing of light and time. It lifts in celebration at the end of the work.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Clarinet Quintet in A major K.581

i. Allegro *ii. Larghetto* *iii. Menuetto* *iv. Allegretto con variazione*

Mozart was entranced by Anton Stadler's reputation as one of the foremost clarinetists of the day, and Stadler's virtuosity on the recently improved instrument inspired him to write his three great works for the clarinet – the *Kegelstatt* Trio, the Concerto, and this Quintet. It was Mozart, Stadler and friends who first performed the Quintet in Vienna, on 22 December 1789, at a benefit concert for the widows and orphans of members of the Established Society of Musicians. Stadler was well known for his ability to play in the chalumeau, or lower register of the clarinet and he experimented with an extension of four semi-tones on his own instrument. It was for this basset clarinet that Mozart wrote both the Quintet and the Concerto. Both works were later published in the altered form to suit a clarinet of the normal range.

The Quintet has the same limpid, lyrical mood of the composer's other late A major works, and it is unusual in being Mozart's only work for a wind instrument and strings to have four movements. No solo preference is given to the clarinet, and it is a string theme, descending in the violins and ascending in the lower strings, which opens the work, the clarinet appearing only in the theme's repeat. In the *Larghetto* the clarinet does take the lead, against muted strings, in a soulful *arioso*, leading to a beautiful dialogue between them. The ardent *Menuetto* has two contrasting trio sections, alternating with the main theme. The final *Allegretto* consists of a simple lively theme with six contrasted variations.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) String Octet in E flat major Op. 20

i. Allegro moderato con fuoco ii. *Andante* iii. *Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo.....iv. Presto*

By the age of 16 Mozart, Schubert, Rossini, and several other composers had written music showing remarkable competence, but none surpassed Felix Mendelssohn at the same age. His Octet, written in 1825, is undoubtedly the most outstanding major composition of one so young, taking its place amongst the finest pieces of chamber music as a consummate work of art. It is thought that the Octet was written for one of his parents' informal recitals, and is dedicated to the composer's string teacher Eduard Rietz.

The work opens with a wide, exuberant and imaginative sweep, and a rhythmic lilt in the principal theme. New contrapuntal detail prevents the sedate second theme from becoming incongruous, and as the movement is developed interesting variants of previous themes appear. After an abruptly quiet passage the music builds to a fiery coda.

The elegiac *Andante*, in the rhythm of a *siciliano*, has fewer memorable tunes and the sonorous music depends more upon tone colour and the complex polyphonic interweaving of its lines. The *Scherzo* is one of the most perfect things Mendelssohn ever wrote and it proved to be a pattern for much that followed. It has exquisite delicacy and lightness of touch, and, in a well-known reference to the work, Mendelssohn's sister Fanny said that all must be played "staccato and pianissimo, with shivering tremolos and lightning flashes of trills". His inspiration was the *Walpurgisnacht* scene from Goethe's *Faust*. Two themes, one rapid and fugal opening with the cello, and the other with tramping unison notes, are the basis of the humour of the final *Presto*. There is another tantalizing glimpse of the *Scherzo* theme, and then there is a long, slow buildup to a brilliant conclusion.

Artist Biographies

Britten Sinfonia

Britten Sinfonia is a different kind of orchestra. It is defined not by the traditional figurehead of a principal conductor, but by the dynamic and democratic meeting of its outstanding individual players and the broad range of their collaborators – from Steve Reich, Thomas Adès and Alison Balsom to Anoushka Shankar, Jacob Collier and Paganini Dance Company.

Rooted in the East of England, where it is the only professional orchestra working throughout the region, Britten Sinfonia also has a national and international reputation as one of today's finest ensembles. It is renowned for its adventurous programming and stunningly high-quality performances, and equally for its record of commissioning new music, nurturing new composing talent, and inspiring schoolchildren, hospital patients and communities across the East of England.

Britten Sinfonia's main touring locations are in London, Saffron Walden, Cambridge and Norwich. The orchestra also performs regularly at London's Wigmore Hall and appears at UK festivals including Aldeburgh, Brighton, Norfolk & Norwich and the BBC Proms. Its prolific discography features many award-winning recordings.

Deborah Pritchard *composer*

Deborah Pritchard won a British Composer Award for her solo violin piece 'Inside Colour' in 2017. She has been broadcast by BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4, released commercially by NMC, Signum and Nimbus and performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, London Sinfonietta, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Philharmonia Orchestra, BBC Singers, Manchester Camerata and the English String Orchestra.

As a synaesthetic composer she has worked with numerous visual artists including Maggi Hambling, Hughie O'Donoghue and Icelandic sculptor Steinunn Thorarinsdottir. Her violin concerto 'Wall of Water' after the paintings by Maggi Hambling was performed at the National Gallery, Sainsbury Wing Theatre and held to critical acclaim by Gramophone as a 'work that will take one's breath away'. She also paints music and has been commissioned a series of 'music maps' for the London Sinfonietta, described in *The Times* as 'beautifully illustrated...paying visual homage to those wonderful medieval maps of the world.'

She studied composition with Simon Bainbridge for her MMus Degree in Composition at the Royal Academy of Music and was awarded her DPhil from Worcester College, Oxford where she studied with Robert Saxton. She currently teaches composition tutorials at the University of Oxford. She was composer in residence at the Lichfield Festival, 2016 through the Sound and Music Embedded scheme and her work features in the 'Hitting the right note: Amazing Women of the Royal Academy of Music' exhibition on display at the Royal Academy of Music.