

Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet

Michael Hasel, flute

Andreas Wittmann, oboe

Walter Seyfarth, clarinet

Fergus McWilliam, horn

Marion Reinhard, bassoon

The Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet (Philharmonisches Bläserquintett Berlin) was founded in 1988, during the era of Herbert von Karajan, the first permanently established wind quintet in the famous orchestra's rich tradition of chamber music.

With four original members since inception (Marion Reinhard succeeded founding bassoonist Henning Trog in 2009), they are living musical witnesses to the hugely productive and influential musical partnerships of the Berlin Philharmonic not only with Karajan, but also with its two most recent Musical Directors: Claudio Abbado and Sir Simon Rattle. Naturally, as members of the Berlin Philharmonic, they have also enjoyed important collaborations with every other major conductor of their times, whether Leonard Bernstein, Carlos Kleiber, Sir John Barbirolli, Günter Wand, Carlo Maria Giulini, Bernard Haitink, Riccardo Muti, James Levine or Daniel Barenboim, to name only a few.

The Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet continues to astonish audiences worldwide with their range of expression, their tonal spectrum and their conceptual unity. Indeed many listeners and critics agree that the ensemble has succeeded in virtually redefining the sound of the classic wind quintet. Their repertoire covers not only the entire spectrum of the wind quintet literature but also includes works for enlarged ensemble, i.e. the Sextets of Janáček and Reinicke or the Septets of Hindemith and Koechlin. In addition, collaboration with pianists such as Lars Vogt, Stephen Hough, Jon Nakamatsu and Lilya Zilberstein have intensified in recent years.

The ensemble's commitment to the wind quintet repertoire is passionate and in 1991 they found the perfect partner for their recording plans, the Swedish company BIS Records, already well known in its own right for its uncompromising standards. The results of this long and exclusive collaboration have received critical accolades worldwide - indeed many of these recordings are already widely held to be "definitive" or "reference" performances.

In addition to their concert appearances throughout Europe, North and South America, Israel, Australia and the Far East, the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet are also popular guests at international festivals such as the Berliner Festwochen, the Edinburgh Festival, the London Proms, the Quintette-Biennale Marseille, the Rheingau Festival and the Salzburg Festival. Their television productions and radio broadcasts are seen and heard throughout Europe, Asia and North America.

In recent years the members of the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet have intensified their teaching and coaching roles with youth; they give chamber music workshops and instrumental instruction in many countries, with a particular commitment, for example, to the youth orchestra program of Venezuela.

Michael Hasel (flute) Michael Hasel was born in Hofheim near Frankfurt and began conducting, piano and organ studies, intending to graduate as a church musician. His first flute teachers were Herbert Grimm and Willy Schmidt and he went on to study piano and conducting with Prof. Francis Travis and flute with Aurèle Nicolet at the Freiburg Musikhochschule. He completed his conducting studies with Prof. Michael Gielen. Michael Hasel's first orchestral appointment as flutist was from 1982 to 1984 with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, after which he became a member of the Berlin Philharmonic under Herbert von Karajan. For several years he performed as principal flute with the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra under conductors such as Daniel Barenboim, Pierre Boulez and James Levine. In 1994 he was appointed Professor of Wind Ensemble and Chamber Music at the Heidelberg-Mannheim Musikhochschule. Both as conductor and soloist Michael Hasel has appeared in Europe, Japan and South America with renowned ensembles such as Ensemble Modern, the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, the Gustav Mahler Chamber Orchester, Orchestra Simon Bolivar and the Berliner Philharmoniker.

Andreas Wittmann (oboe), Andreas Wittmann, was born in Munich. He studied oboe at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich with Prof. Manfred Clement and later at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin with Hansjörg Schellenberger. In Munich he studied conducting with Prof. Hermann Michael and participated in conducting masterclasses with Sergiu Celibidache. Wittmann spent only one year as a scholarship student at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Academy before being appointed to the Berlin Philharmonic itself in 1986. He is an internationally active soloist, chamber musician and teacher, whose career has also included performing as Principal Oboe with the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra and the Berlin Philharmonic. He taught at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Academy for several years before becoming its General Manager in 2013. Wittmann is currently Permanent Guest Conductor of Brazil's Orquesta Sinfónica Salvador de Bahia. He regularly conducts the Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin, as well as the Sibelius-Orchester of Berlin.

Walter Seyfarth (clarinet) is a native of Düsseldorf and was a first prize winner at the age of sixteen in the Deutscher Tonkünstlerverband competition. Following his studies at the Freiburg Musikhochschule with Peter Rieckhoff and with Karl Leister at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Academy, he was appointed to the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra. In 1985, he joined the Berlin Philharmonic as Solo Eb-Clarinetist. It was Seyfarth who was the driving force behind the founding of the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet in 1988. He is also a member of the larger ensemble "The Winds of the Berlin Philharmonic". Among his teaching and mentoring responsibilities are the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Academy, the Jeunesses Musicales World Orchestra and the Venezuelan Youth Orchestras Programme, El Sistema.

Fergus McWilliam (horn) was born on the shores of Scotland's Loch Ness and studied initially in Canada (John Simonelli, Frederick Rizner, and at the University of Toronto with Eugene Rittich), having made his début as a soloist with the Toronto Symphony under Seiji Ozawa at the age of fifteen. Further studies were undertaken in Amsterdam (Adriaan van Woudenberg) and Stockholm (Wilhelm Lanzky-Otto). From 1972 through 1979 McWilliam was a member of several Canadian orchestras and chamber music ensembles before joining the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. From 1982 to 1985 he was a member of the Bavarian Radio Symphony and in 1985 he was appointed to the Berlin Philharmonic under Herbert von Karajan. He is not only active internationally as a soloist and chamber musician but teaches at a number of internationally renowned music schools, including the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Academy. He has worked with the Venezuelan youth music programme El Sistema for a decade and now is a Board Director of Sistema Scotland. McWilliam served on Berliner Philharmoniker committees for 23 years and is the author of the acclaimed book "Blow Your OWN Horn".

Marion Reinhard (bassoon) was born in Nuremberg (Nürnberg) and from 1991 to 1995 studied at the Meistersinger Conservatory with Walter Urbach and Karsten Nagel. While still only a student, she began performing with the Nuremberg Philharmonic Orchestra as Contra Bassoonist. In 1995 she won a scholarship to study at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Academy with Stefan Schweigert and Daniele Damiano. Further studies with Georg Kluetsch in Weimar rounded out her musical training and in 1999 Marion Reinhard was appointed to the Berlin Philharmonic where she became a direct colleague of Henning Trog. From 1996 until her appointment to the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet, she was a founding member of the Orsolino Wind Quintet, an ensemble which was mentored by Michael Hasel. They won many international prizes, including the Munich A.R.D. Competition and also made numerous recordings.

Wind Quintet in F Major, Op. 53, No. 3 (1821)

Franz Ignaz Danzi (1763–1826)

Andante sostenuto-Allegro

Andante

Menuetto

Allegretto

Franz Danzi and Anton Reicha, were central figures in the development of the woodwind quintet in the early 19th century, at a time when these instruments were being standardized and improved technically so that they could participate in ensemble performance and when composers were beginning to relish new timbre in larger ensembles. Reicha, composer and theorist teaching in Paris, who created no less than 24 works for the small wind ensemble, is recognized as the counterpart to Haydn who developed the string quartet in the 18th century. Franz Danzi, a conductor and composer working in Karlsruhe, and whose career parallels in many respects that of his contemporary, reportedly learned of Reicha's quintets from articles in the German music journal, *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*. Accordingly he adopted Reicha's concept of music for wind ensemble and composed three groups of three quintets, nine in all, opus 56 (dedicated to Antonin Reicha) in 1821, and opus 67 and opus 68, the latter two both published in 1824. All nine quintets by Danzi are in four movements: the first in sonata form, the second, a slow movement in three-part form, followed by a minuet and trio, and a rondo finale.

Throughout Op. 53, No. 3 Danzi has “paired” the flute and the oboe; the slow introduction to the first movement clearly establishes the relationship of trading phrases, which continues throughout the work, always following regular classical style of 4 or 8-measures. The interesting consequence of this relationship is that rarely do all five instruments play at the same time; with few exceptions the texture is in four parts. As in classical form, three of the movements are in the principal key of F Major, with the second slow–or “song”–movement in the key of the subdominant, Bb Major, as is the Trio of the Minuet.

A couple of features of the work might be brought interesting at this time. The first concerns the harmony which is consistent with the language of the period. In the first movement there are some nice chromatic touches, and occasionally Danzi moves briefly to a remote key area. This is done so skillfully that it is hardly noticeable: in the second segment of the Minuet he briefly moves into the key of Db (the key of the lowered 6th degree of F) and then, again, in the last movement he dips down to the key of D Maj (the 6th degree this time). Next, pay attention in the Minuet-Trio where he apparently appreciates the color provided by the bassoon, horn and clarinet and gives them brief moments to speak out. And finally, listen to the rhythmic character of the principal theme of the last movement, which is in triple meter. The repeated notes start on the downbeat of the first measure, and the flute enters with the principal theme on the second half of the second beat with a 3-note pick up to a phrase that ends on the second beat of the 5th measure. The result is that the theme feels consistently as though it is five measures long—and not the standard four. Thus all the way through the movement this prominent theme always feels a bit “off center,” an element that gives it a special kind of “lift.”

Antonín Rejcha had quite an interesting life, apparently the result of a mixture of luck and self-determination. Anton, as he was known in later life, was born in Prague. Apparently neglected as a child, he ran away from home at the age of ten years and ended up with his uncle Josef, a professional cellist and conductor, in Bavaria who taught him violin and piano. He also studied the flute and learned German and French. After a stint in Bonn where he played in the court orchestra and began to study composition, his desire to become a noted composer took him to Hamburg, France, and Vienna. So far, though not truly successful, he none the less took the opportunity to study with some of the most famous teachers of the time: Christian Gottlieb Neefe in Bonn, Salieri and Albrechtsberger in Vienna. Eventually he returned to Paris where he became a professor of composition and theory at the Paris Conservatory; he became a naturalized French citizen, was awarded the Chevalier of Honor and was made a member of the French Academy. He clearly was quite a character, as his theory texts dealt with subjects far beyond his time, such as poly-rhythm, polytonality and micro-tonality (or quarter-tones). His sight-reading exercises were known to be fiendishly difficult. Because he couldn't be bothered to arrange performances or publication of his music, his manuscripts were in complete disarray when he died and there is still no definitive study of his work. In some ways it's not surprising that some of the more adventurous and daring composers of their time, Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz and Charles Gounod, were among his students.

The scores for two Andantes and Adagio for solo *cor anglais* and four winds are located in the library of the Paris Conservatory. Today's work, the first of these, was composed in 1817, during the period when he was working on his numerous wind quintets. Clearly meant as a "show piece" for English horn, all the principal features of the instrument are on display. The dark richness of the tone is played off against the light and high timbre of the flute. When occasionally some of the other instruments have a brief soloistic moment, it is usually more to create formal balance between the instrumental parts. The form is simple: two principal contrasting themes—one with a dotted rhythm, the other more flowing in nature—written either so that the soloist has the central melody, or so there are empty spaces in the theme for soloistic commentary. In several of these places the line explores the instrument's full range. It is certain that this work was composed for the old curved *cor anglais*, not the modern, improved version, as it was only available later.

Six Bagatelles for Wind Quintet (1953)

Györgi Ligeti (1923-2004)

- I. Allegro con spirito
- II. Rubato. Lamentoso
- III. Allegro grazioso
- IV. Presto ruvido (Fast and coarse)
- V. Adagio. Mesto. *Béla Bartók in memoriam*
- VI. Molto vivace. Capriccioso

In his commentary about the Bagatelles, Ligeti describes his mind-set as he approached composing the piece that was the basis for the Bagatelles. Here he reveals what was to become the foundation of his life's work, at the heart of which was a desire to uncover or discover a music not yet heard.

I wrote 11 piano pieces in Budapest between 1950 and 1953, in an attempt—fruitless—to find a style of my own. This was *musica ricercata* in the true sense of “ricercare”: to try out, to seek. I started to experiment with simple structures of rhythms and sounds, in order to evolve a new music from nothing, so to speak. I regarded all the music I had known and loved up to then as something I couldn't use. I asked myself: what can I do with a single note, what can I do with an octave, or with an interval, or two intervals, or specific rhythmic situations.

Then in 1953 in response to a request, he arranged six of those eleven piano pieces for flute (doubling piccolo), oboe, B-flat clarinet, F-horn and bassoon. In his commentary, it becomes clear that the original purpose of his “research” was somewhat compromised—no doubt in part because of the then-current political situation. He comments:

Four pieces from this cycle were “pseudo-folkloristic”: no actual folk songs are quoted, but Nos. 2 and 5 have an “Hungarian diction” about them. No. 5 depicts mourning bells in memory of Bartók. No. 4, with its “limping” dance music is Balkan, and No. 3 depicts an artificial hybrid of Banat-Romanian and Serbian melodic idioms. My Bagatelles were finally performed in Budapest in 1956. At the time they were called Five Bagatelles, since No. 6 – despite the thaw in the political climate—still contained too many minor seconds. (Dissonances and chromaticism were still “cosmopolitan” and “hostile to the people,” just somewhat less so than previously.) The audience of intellectuals and musicians was at a loss as to whether or not they were permitted to enjoy the music or applaud.

The full composition, all six pieces, were finally premiered in 1966 in Stockholm.

Bagatelle, that is, a “trifle,” is not a new title for musical compositions; we find it in use as early as Couperin. While these pieces are usually small works without much pretension, it's not

always the case. Beethoven composed several series for piano, one of which, for instance, begins simply enough but unfolds like an improvisation. In the case of these particularly delightful pieces by Ligeti, the serious intent of the compositional process is hardly noticeable to the listener, but rest assured, these are concentrated gems of musical thought.

Number One, *Allegro con spirito*, with only four different pitches none the less bursts with energy. The basic element is the interval of a third, used both melodically and to build chords. Inventively the idea passes between individual instruments and constantly-changing groupings. Opening and closing sections are a kind of “tattoo.”

In number two, *Rubato lamentoso*, Ligeti asks the ensemble to “play very freely.” Using mostly seconds, both major and minor, melodically and vertically, he explores broadly. Now as a solo melody, then in unison or in canon, now as chords—chords that change character and evolve as they move through the ensemble. The opening returns at the end.

Number three opens with a constant 7-note ostinato—marked *con moto, giusto*—accompanying a lovely floating melody—*cantabile, molto legato*—played again and again, each time in different combinations: first the melody in the flute with clarinet and bassoon trading off the ostinato; then oboe and clarinet in thirds, flute and bassoon with the ostinato; next, the flute and oboe take on the melody in thirds with the horn in canon, clarinet and bassoon have the ostinato. . . seven iterations in all. It’s sort of like watching the colors flash, change and combine as a faceted jewel is turned in the light.

Number four, *sempre non legato, tenuto*, is a so-called “limping” dance in Bulgarian style. In 7/8 meter, this bagatelle’s rhythmic pattern is a challenge! Groups of 2 and 3 accented and unaccented eighth notes in a metric pattern two measures long. (Try it! And count fast!

12 123 12 | 123 12 12—the bold numbers have the accents.) Ligeti remarks that this number “should be very dance-like and played vigorously in tempo; *sfs* (*sforzatos*) should be strongly accented throughout.”

Bagatelle number five, *Rubato, Lamentoso*, begins as a funeral lament. Low, single notes—like a muted military drum—measure time. The oboe wails with grief-stricken, short-long rhythmic gestures: all minor thirds. Unexpectedly the dotted figure takes hold of the whole ensemble in a kind of brief defiance. Clarinet and bassoon resume the lament until the dotted figure again bursts out *fortissimo*, bassoon blowing out a deep augmented 4th in the lowest voice. Then, energy spent: simple, slow uneven and uneasy trills slowly evolve into a simple, stable and empty open fifth filled out with a major third—sounding more resigned than resolved.

The sixth and most adventurous Bagatelle—banned in 1956 Budapest—returns to the hyper energy of the first one, but now having expanded his pallet to eleven pitches, Ligeti creates some highly dissonant harmonies. Capricious, less orderly and longer than the others, segments follow no consoling formal structure. The principal components—shorter and longer step-wise melodic fragments, starting diatonic then turning into chromatic streams; repeated notes, punctuating and short, becoming insistently repetitive; and arching triads, melodic soloistic lines holding their own against the punching interruption of repeated patterns—vie for prominence until everything comes to what seems like a frustrated standstill that breaks off suddenly. The bassoon has one final gesture to close.

Wind Quintet, Op. 43 (1922)

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

Allegro ben moderato

Menuetto

Praeludium - Tema con variazioni. Adagio. Un poco andantino

Nielsen's Fifth Symphony, the work that demanded some of his most strenuous and innovative thought, was his response to the turbulent years of World War I. After its premiere in the spring of 1922, he retired to one of his favorite locations, Göteborg in Sweden, to rest and to compose. The result of this respite was the Quintet for Winds, one of his best-known and most beloved compositions. With its charming clarity and approachability, it is often seen as the antipode to the rough and tumble of the Fifth Symphony, but to consider it a light counter-weight to the Symphony hardly does it justice. On its own, this piece of chamber music achieves a balance in style that is quite remarkable: neither too ambitious, nor simplistic, neither stridently modern, nor archaic.

The story goes that Nielsen composed the work with five specific players in mind, players with whom he was well-acquainted, each one known for his strong personality. On occasion, during performances one can readily "hear" the conversation that might be taking place between these fellows: sometimes tense and distrustful, alternately agreeable and convivial. Indeed, one comes across as soulful, another obstinate and argumentative, another persistent and interruptive, then lastly, one of them seems alternately fastidious and flighty. In his own program note for a performance, Nielsen writes (in third person):

The Quintet for Winds is one of the composer's latest works in which he has attempted to render the characters of the various instruments. At one moment they are all talking at once, at another they are quite alone. The work consists of three movements: Allegro, Minuet, and Prelude-Theme with Variations. The theme for these variations is the melody for one of C.Ns spiritual songs, which has been made the basis for a set of variations, now merry and baroque, now elegiac and serious, ending with the theme in all its simplicity, completely quiet in expression.

The Quintet is in three movements; the third of which, an extended set of variations with a "Praeludium" for an introduction, is almost as long as the first two together. The first movement, an inviting Allegro in a "flexed" sonata form, opens in the solo bassoon with a congenial tune (typically Nielsen). It starts with a falling motive that subsequently rises up the scale, gets faster and faster until it falls back to where it began. A playful, perky response in the rest of the instruments leads into a somewhat extended answer. Typical for Nielsen, he simply "takes off" with melodic ideas until he comes to a resting point where he reconnoiters, and, taking up the skeleton of the formal structure, simply moves on.

The Minuet is a modest and fairly well-behaved piece, so much so that one barely notices the cross-relationships in the keys of the minuet and trio. This movement is so modest, in fact, that the dramatic character of the following Prelude comes as quite a surprise. Here Nielsen

switches out the sound of the oboe with the sound of the much darker and serious-sounding English Horn, made all the more prominent when each and every phrase on the instrument begins with *ff* and trails off to *pp* or *ppp*. When the theme of the variations that follows is played, its simplicity works to tame, but also to extend the extravagant outburst of the Prelude. The tune for the variations, a setting of a pietistic text, “My Jesus, Let My Heart Receive,” was one of a group of hymns composed by Nielsen ca. 1914 for a projected publication of psalms and spiritual songs. While composing these tunes, he wrote to his wife the following insightful comment:

It’s strange how it goes with these melodies. It is as if it isn’t I who makes them; but they come into my room like small animals or birds and ask if they can come along. I am amazed and am often so happy in this work because it is a completely different world than the one where my big things are at home.

Once the variations get underway we are in for fun: professionals enjoy indulging in vivid ensemble playing that the audience—once “tuned in”—can also experience. Surely this aspect of the work is the one that insures its enduring popularity. In this movement the instruments are at their most individualistic; they may well be perceived as five independent personalities. Note how the texture changes from one variation to the next: now a duo, then a solo, then a trio or back into the quintet formation. Listen to them argue, poke fun, be impertinent or consoling. Each instrument has at least one special moment in this variation set.

- *Notes by Dr. Jean Christensen*

The pre-concert lecture will be presented by Professor Bruce Heim in room 130, beginning at 2 PM. All are welcome to come to listen to Professor Heim, an accomplished hornist and advocate for all wind chamber music. Surely, ‘twill be doubly enlightening.