



# Sinopia Quartet

February 9<sup>th</sup> 2019

The tense civic discussions that normally fill the Council Chamber at Kilmory were, as expected, displaced last Saturday evening, as members of the Sinopia String Quartet took their seats and Laura Sargeant, cellist, introduced the Mid Argyll Arts Association Concert. Laura announced that Kilmory was the most magnificent building, and certainly the only Castle, they had performed in during their tour of Scotland.

Laura then introduced Borodin's 1881 Quartet no 2. Not professionally trained as a musician, Borodin was a scientist who significantly advanced organic chemistry. Oddly, his fellow composers were pleased when his ill health kept him from his day job, but only because he then had time to compose his most beautiful music. And his second quartet is a wonderful example. Transported immediately by the melodies of the first movement, the audience, after the start of the second, might have thought they had actually been transported to the Odeon or the Gaumont, or even the Screen Machine, as the melody of 'Baubles Bangles and Beads' evoked Anne Blyth's voice from the 1953 film of the musical 'Kismet'. By the third movement they may have become convinced of this, as the music for Disney's animation of Hans Christian Anderson's, 'The Little Matchstick Girl' was undoubtedly being played. Significant that two silver screen ventures took inspiration from this one work.

Gabi Maas, first violin, then introduced Frank Bridge's 1906, 'Three Idylls'. Dedicated to Bridge's future wife, the pair first having met while sharing a viola desk at the Royal College of Music. The 1<sup>st</sup> Idyll opens with the theme on solo viola, Bridge's favourite instrument, and though somewhat dark, this was surely Bridge speaking directly to his beloved. The mood lightens in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Idyll and by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> there are distant wedding bells. But Frank must have been nervous when Miss Sinclair returned to her native Australia for a while, before finally accepting his hand. That this work inspired the 'Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge' by Benjamin Britten is testament to its quality.

After a refreshing glass of water and a choice of sweets, the audience returned after the interval to a surprise. A Mazurka, Berceuse and Polka, by three little known Russian Composers - friends of Borodin, and respectively, Lyadov, D'Osten-Sacken, and Kopylov - were to be played. However no one took Laura up on her invitation to dance to the Polka.

The final work was Dvorak's American Quartet in F major. Written in 1893 while on holiday with Czech compatriots living in Spillville Iowa, Dvorak composed this piece in just thirteen days. 'I wanted to write something melodious and straightforward' was his comment on the work, composed shortly after his New World Symphony. Although the bird-song of the Scarlet Tanager, or was it the Red-Eyed Vireo, features in the third movement, the work is built around original melodies inspired by African-American spirituals with some possible influence in its rhythms from Dvorak's obsession with train spotting.

This was a splendid concert with truly masterful performances. We are so fortunate in Argyll - beautiful scenery, plenty of rain, so many castles, and such talented visiting musicians.

Robert Lacey