



Norwich-based music writer, Tony Cooper, offers a glimpse into the post-pandemic kick-start to the

# Norwich Assembly House lunchtime concert series

An initiative of the Assembly House Trust, this enterprising series of monthly lunchtime chamber concerts (all starting at one o'clock on the dot!) was inaugurated in 2017 to the sheer delight of the legion of classical-music aficionados in Norwich and beyond. They take place in the splendid and opulent surroundings of the lovely and inviting Music Room of the Georgian-built Assembly House, a Grade I listed building, situated right at the heart of the Fine City of Norwich opposite The Forum and next door to the Theatre Royal.

Incidentally, Richard Wagner's father-in-law, pianist Franz Liszt, performed here in September 1840 in the very same room where these lunchtime concerts are held as part of his Grand Tour of England, Scotland and Ireland. Such is the rich and illustrious history of this wonderful building which was reborn in 1950 by a major restoration programme costing £70,000 re-opening in May of the same year as a centre for entertainment and the arts. The restoration programme was strongly encouraged by the legendary English artist and, indeed, one of the foremost stage designers of the 20th century Oliver Messel and funded by the Norwich-based shoe manufacturer, H J Sexton.

Therefore, keeping the performing arts alive in this most beautiful of all Norwich buildings is the Assembly House chamber concert series. In total, five concerts make up this short post-pandemic season curated by Roger Rowe, formerly programme director of the Norfolk & Norwich Music Club where he enjoyed a wonderful and successful 20-year tenure. Working in tandem with Iain Lowery, promoter of the concert series, they have forged a strong and fulfilling partnership bringing to the city a wide range of artists and ensembles largely

given by prize-winning musicians at the start of their careers.

And kicking off the season (24th June) is the **Mithras Piano Trio** - Ionel Manciu (violin), Leo Popplewell (cello), Dominic Degavo (piano). A lovely and welcoming programme is on offer comprising Mozart's Piano Trio in B flat and Mendelssohn's Piano Trio, No 2, in C minor.

An award-winning trio, they took top honours in the 10th Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition last year and also won the 67th Royal Over-Seas League Competition in 2019 whilst in the same year they won the Cavatina Intercollegiate Chamber Music Competition. Considering they only came together in 2017 when students at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama they have blossomed and matured considerably to the delight of so many concertgoers.

Not only does this fine trio perform at many of London's major venues such as the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Milton Court Concert Hall but they also undertake concerts at prominent festivals such as the Lake District Summer Music Festival, the Guildhall Chamber Music Festival, Highgate International Chamber Music Festival and Leeds International Concert Season.

Following hard on their heels comes the **Zoffany Ensemble** - Manon Derome (violin), Simone van der Giessen (viola), Anthony Pleeth (cello), Michael Dussek (piano) - who perform many of the great works in the chamber-music repertoire by Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Schumann whilst also digging out works by such neglected composers as Louise Farrenc and Anton Arensky. However, their programme for Assembly House Classical (15th July) remains firmly in the traditional

chamber-music repertoire comprising Mozart's Piano Quartet in G minor and Fauré's Piano Quartet in C minor.

Interestingly, the ensemble takes its name from the German-born, Neo-classical artist and founding member of London's Royal Academy of Art, Johann Zoffany. His paintings portray eminent actors such as David Garrick but they often depict members of the nobility, too, in their pursuit of musical entertainment. Zoffany came to London in 1760 and from 1770 to 1800 produced work of exceptional quality, much of it now displayed in the National Gallery, the Tate Gallery and the Royal Collection.

Based in London and Edinburgh, violinist **Daniel Piore** is a soloist, collaborative artist and advocate for new and experimental music. He has performed as soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the London Contemporary Orchestra and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Interestingly, he appeared with Jonny Greenwood (of Radiohead fame) in a highly-rated, televised BBC Late Night Prom in the last full season in 2019.

For his Assembly House début (26th August) he joins the well-known cellist **Clare O'Connell** who needs little or no introduction as she has been a regular visitor to the city over many years. She has performed with leading ensembles such as Chroma for Norwich Chamber Music (formerly Norfolk & Norwich Music Club) as well as performing at The Chapel in Park Lane in another concert series curated by Roger Rowe. And during Lockdown III, she produced a solo album 'The Isolated Cellist' which was highly recommended on Saturday's Record Review broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

More than interested in finding new ways of listening to and creating sound as well as developing strong collaborations with composers, musicians, artists and writers, Daniel Piore



*The Mithras Trio*



*The Zoffany Ensemble © Patrick Allen*

works closely with the acclaimed author Michael Morpurgo in a collaboration that has created The Storyteller's Ensemble, a group of musicians devoted to the written and spoken word.

A passionate performer, arranger and curator, Clare O'Connell (who, by the way, plays a cello crafted by Stefan Krattenmacher) has over 20 years' experience as a cellist specialising in contemporary chamber music. She's a member of visionary ensemble Lontano and the 12-piece cross-genre ensemble of multi-instrumentalists Propellor as well as The Storyteller's Ensemble.

Recent highlights include a performance at the Wigmore Hall of her own arrangement of 'The Lark Ascending' with Daniel Piore, a solo performance in 'An Elephant in the Garden' at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on London's South Bank

whilst playing the solo cello part in Samuel Bordoli's miniature music-theatre piece for tenor and cello 'Belongings' as part of the Invisible Opera House inquiry programme.

A graduate of Wadham College, Oxford, Clare O'Connell studied Ancient and Modern History followed by a postgraduate course at the Royal College of Music and the Hochschule für Künste in Bremen with the internationally-acclaimed cellist and teacher, Alexander Baillie.

Two masterful and well-loved chamber musicians - cellist **Richard Tunnicliffe** and pianist **Maggie Cole** - conclude the series on 23rd September offering a delectable and entertaining programme devoted entirely to Beethoven: Horn Sonata (cello arr.) in F major, Variations on *Judas Maccabeus* and Cello Sonata, No 3, in A major.

Over the past few years Richard Tunnicliffe turned to the other 'B' and recorded all of Bach's cello suites, the culmination of many years of study and countless performances. The recording for Linn was warmly greeted by critics and public alike while *The Sunday Times* praised its 'clear-sighted, intelligently-informed yet emotionally-engaged performances'.

American-born, Maggie Cole - who is professor of fortepiano at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and teaches early keyboards at Dartington International Summer School - enjoys an international career playing and recording on harpsichord, fortepiano and modern piano. She's best known through numerous recitals on BBC Radio 3 and appearances at leading British festivals. Abroad, however, she has performed in venues from Seattle to Moscow and from Finland to India. In addition to a busy solo career she enjoys duo partnerships and has collaborated with the likes of counter-tenor Michael Chance, sopranos Nancy Argenta and Julia Gooding, flautist Philippa Davies, cellist Steven Isserlis and violinist Catherine Mackintosh.

Star of the harpsichord, too, her recordings for this most delicate-sounding instrument include Bach's Goldberg Variations, Poulenc's Concert Champêtre, Boccherini's Sonatas with Steven Isserlis and Bach's flute sonatas with Philippa Davies as well as the complete Bach violin sonatas with Catherine Mackintosh. On fortepiano, her recent CD of Haydn trios with Trio Goya will be followed by a recording of the Opus 1 Beethoven trios. On modern piano, she recently released a CD of music by Philippe Gaubert with flautist, Idit Shemer.

■ All concerts take place on Thursdays commencing at one o'clock. Tickets are priced at £20 available from [www.assemblyhouseclassical.eventbrite.com](http://www.assemblyhouseclassical.eventbrite.com)

For other booking and payment options please visit [www.assemblyhouseclassical.co.uk/other-ways-to-book](http://www.assemblyhouseclassical.co.uk/other-ways-to-book) or call the promoter, Iain Lowery, on 07786 940 878



*Daniel Piore*