



# ACADEMY OF ST MARTIN IN THE FIELDS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

This press book contains (in order):

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- Discography
- Full reviews (beginning with the most recent)
- Feature articles

NOTES: When searching for suitable pull-quotes, be sure to check through the "Full reviews" section. The "Press excerpts" are not comprehensive, and do not necessarily display the best selections.



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## Academy of St Martin in the Fields

### Chamber Ensemble

**Tomo Keller**, violin

**Harvey De Souza**, violin

**Jennifer Godson**, violin

**Martin Burgess**, violin

**Robert Smissen**, viola

**Fiona Bonds**, viola

**Stephen Orton**, cello

**Will Schofield**, cello

The Academy Chamber Ensemble was formed in 1967, drawing its membership from the world-renowned chamber orchestra the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, which was itself founded by Sir Neville Marriner in 1958 and is currently led by Music Director Joshua Bell. The purpose behind the formation of the Chamber Ensemble was to perform the larger scale chamber music repertoire with players who customarily worked together, instead of the usual string quartet with additional guests. Drawn from the principal players of the orchestra and play-directed by Academy Director / Leader Tomo Keller, the Chamber Ensemble now performs in multiple configurations from wind trios to string octets. Its touring commitments are extensive and include regular tours of Europe and North America, whilst recording contracts with Philips Classics, Hyperion, and Chandos have led to the release of over thirty CDs.

The Academy Chamber Ensemble's October 2018 tour of the United States and Canada is supported by Maria Cardamone and Paul Matthews, together with the American Friends of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. The American Friends was founded in 1998 to support the work of the Academy around the world, particularly in the USA. Find out more at [www.asmf.org](http://www.asmf.org)

You can also find the Academy on:

Facebook: /asmforchestra

Twitter: @asmforchestra

YouTube: /TheASMF

SoundCloud: /asmf

“an ensemble of first-rate musicians, technically superb, generously expressive, and obviously enjoying themselves.” —*Dallas Morning News*

“impressively seamless ensemble” —Chicago Classical Review

“impressive sophistication and complexity of phrasing, elegant articulation and an impeccable sense of balance... What sets the Academy apart from other ensembles is its exceptional musical intelligence.” —*Seen and Heard international*

## **The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble**

### **Individual member bios**

**Tomo Keller** (violin) was born in Stuttgart in 1974, to German-Japanese musicians, and started playing the violin at the age of six. At ten years old he gave his first performances with orchestra. He studied at Vienna’s University for Music and Performing Arts and New York’s Juilliard School of Music. Numerous top prizes and awards followed, at the Fritz Kreisler Competition, the Johannes Brahms Competition, and the German Music Competition Berlin where he was awarded the Grand Prize. He was also the first instrumentalist to receive the Aalto Stage Prize for young musicians. He has since performed at major concert halls all around the world, most recently at the new Philharmonic Halls of Hamburg and Paris and has been invited both as soloist and chamber musician to music festivals such as the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festspiele and Festival de Musica Manuel de Falla. He has also been a frequent guest on radio and television broadcasts on ARD, BBC, NHK and ORF. As a soloist Tomo has performed with the Beethovenhalle Orchestra Bonn, St Petersburg Camerata, London Symphony Orchestra, Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin and the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. Concert tours have led him all across Europe, as well as Russia, Asia, America and the Middle East.

Tomo Keller is a much sought-after orchestral leader, having led the London Symphony Orchestra as Assistant Leader from 2009-2015. In 2014 he became first concert master of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. He has also appeared with more than 20 orchestras as guest leader all over Europe, the US and Asia. Tomo was appointed Leader of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields in December 2015. Tomo’s recordings include solo works by Bach, Bartók and Ysaÿe, orchestral recordings including Stravinsky’s Apollon musagète with Sir John Eliot Gardiner/LSO, and Avant Gershwin with Patti Austin and the WDR Big Band, which was awarded a Grammy in 2008. He has given violin, chamber music and orchestral masterclasses at all major London Music Colleges as well as at Yale University and numerous other schools in the US and the Far East.

Tomo Keller plays the 1709 ‘Crafoord’ Stradivarius violin, kindly made available to him by the Swedish Järnåker Foundation.

**Harvey de Souza** (violin) has been a member of the Academy since 1993 and has led the orchestra on tours with Sir Neville Marriner and soloists including Joshua Bell and Julia Fischer. As a member of the Chamber Ensemble he has performed extensively throughout South America, Europe and the USA.

Harvey has been a member of the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, and a member of the Vellinger String Quartet, who were winners of the 1994 London International String Quartet Competition. He has been Principal Guest Director of the Lancashire Sinfonietta, and is co-artistic director of the Sangat Chamber Music Festival, now in its seventeenth year in Mumbai. Harvey plays on a Carlo Bergonzi, kindly lent to him by the Beare's International Violin Society.

**Jennifer Godson** (violin) has been a member of the Academy since 1985. She was for many years a member of the Fairfield String Quartet with whom she toured extensively in Britain and abroad. She now leads a busy chamber and orchestral career and has a special interest in period performance. She is sub-leader of John Eliot Gardiner's Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique and a member of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, with whom she has appeared as guest leader.

**Martin Burgess** (violin) began playing with the Academy in 1992, taking up the position of Principal Second Violin in 1998. Having studied with Emanuel Hurwitz and the Amadeus Quartet he brought with him the love of chamber music. He leads the Grammy nominated Emperor Quartet (winners of the prestigious Evian International String Quartet Competition). The Quartet has released critically acclaimed CDs of music by Britten, Walton, Martinu and James MacMillan. They have also performed on several film soundtracks, notably *There Will Be Blood* and *Norwegian Wood* (both written by Jonny Greenwood from Radiohead).

Martin enjoys a wide variety of playing away from both these ensembles, most recently recording and then touring the world with Peter Gabriel.

**Robert Smissen** (viola) won a scholarship to Chethams School of Music at the age of 14, and went on to study at the Guildhall School of Music with David Takeno. While there he won prizes for chamber music and solo playing. After college he was appointed principal viola with the Northern Sinfonia, a post he held until 1986. He currently plays with the Academy, as well as other London chamber orchestras.

**Fiona Bonds** (viola) is Associate Principal Viola of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and enjoys a busy and diverse career outside the orchestra. She has recently been appointed Principal Viola of the City of London Sinfonia and is a founder member of the Grammy-

nominated Emperor String Quartet, who have recently released a critically acclaimed disc of Benjamin Britten's quartets.

**Stephen Orton** (cello) was born in Ripon, Yorkshire, and studied with William Pleeth at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He has been principal cello with the Bournemouth Sinfonietta and the City of London Sinfonia and was also a member of the Delmé Quartet for ten years. He has acted as guest principal cello with the London Symphony Orchestra and Philharmonia. Stephen has wide experience of chamber music and has often played the Schubert Quintet with the Chilingirian Quartet. In 1985 Stephen became principal cello with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and has played concertos with the orchestra. He is also a member of the Academy Chamber Ensemble, touring internationally and making numerous recordings. He has recently joined the Chilingirian Quartet in 2013.

**Will Schofield** (cello) was born in London to Australian and Italian parents. He read music at Edinburgh University and went on to study with Radu Aldulescu in Rome and at the Menuhin Academy in Gstaad, Switzerland.

Will has been cellist with the Grammy nominated Emperor String Quartet since the group was formed in 1992. He started playing with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields the following year, and membership of these two groups has been the primary focus of his playing career ever since. With the Quartet he has played throughout Europe, North and South America and in Africa, appearing at all of the major festivals in the UK and at numerous festivals abroad including Prague Spring Festival, 'Mostly Mozart' New York, Flanders, Monte Carlo, Montpellier/Radio France and Kuhmo in Finland. The Quartet records for BIS, the latest project being a complete cycle of Britten. He has also played as a guest with the Allegri and Maggini Quartets and with the Schubert Ensemble of London.

With the Academy Will has had the opportunity to play the key repertoire for Chamber Orchestra at the highest level, working and recording with musicians such as Murray Perahia, Joshua Bell, Janine Jansen, Julia Fischer and, of course, Sir Neville Marriner.

As a freelance cellist Will has played as Guest Principal Cello with many of the country's top orchestras such as the Royal Philharmonic and the English Chamber Orchestra, and with orchestras in Ireland and Spain. He has played on numerous film soundtracks, and with the Emperor Quartet has collaborated with Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood on several projects, most notably the soundtrack to the 2007 movie *There Will Be Blood*.

2019-20 season. Please discard previous or undated materials. Musicians subject to change.

Press Excerpts—Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble

"This was an ensemble of first-rate musicians, technically superb, generously expressive, and obviously enjoying themselves. Everything was nicely buoyed and lovingly phrased."

— *Dallas Morning News*

"The academy players captured the splendor in an account full of purposeful drama and poetic grace."

— *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland)

"Something special....this memorable [concert] is sure to stand out as one of the area's top events this season."

— *Denver Post*

"The musicians managed to produce the sound more often made by a chamber orchestra...irresistible."

— *The Buffalo News*

"Good reason to turn off the stereo and go to a real live concert."

— *The Milwaukee Sentinel*

"A shimmering performance...the exquisitely phrased passages were played with subtle expressiveness that brought out the romanticism of the music without sentimentalizing it."

"A superb example of consummate artistry."

— *The Deseret Morning News* (Salt Lake City)

"The Academy group responded to the music with picture-perfect lightness in the scherzo and exuberance in the finale."

— *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

"A superb performance...the ensemble bit into the music like a starving man, and produced a whirlwind of sound, wild and untamed."

"A supremely satisfying and memorable performance."

— *Palm Beach Daily News*

“An alert, almost improvisatory response to Dvorak’s inspiration....The playing is first class throughout.”  
— *Gramophone*

“The performances, by ASMF Chamber Ensemble, are nothing short of stunning....I recommend the disc with unmitigated enthusiasm.”  
— *Gramophone*

“I have never heard a better performance on or off record. Strongly recommended.”  
— *Gramophone*

“Splendid playing; impeccable sound and balance.”  
— *Gramophone*

“A reading of compelling grandeur....masterful.”  
— *BBC Music Magazine*

“The sound of a chamber orchestra...the polish of a string quartet....sparkling....The embracing warmth, the precision and seeming weightlessness crested in a fairylike scherzo that sailed just above common earth.”  
— *Milwaukee Sentinel*

“A keen feeling for textural blending and tonal balance....beautifully coloured...a sparkling performance.”  
— *The Canberra Times (Australia)*

“The performance by the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble was well-characterized, fervently committed and admirably exact. Just about beyond criticism, in fact.”  
— *The Times (London)*

**ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN  
THE FIELDS CHAMBER ENS.**

**COMPLETE DISCOGRAPHY**

(all recordings on CHANDOS)

**Arnold Bax**

Octet, for horn, piano and string sextet;  
String Quintet;  
Concerto for Flute, Oboe, Harp, and String  
Quartet (Septet); Threnody and Scherzo for  
bassoon, harp, and string sextet; In Memoriam,  
for cor anglais, harp and string quartet

**CHAN 9602**

**Johannes Brahms**

String Sextet No 1 in B flat Op.18  
String Sextet No 2 in G major Op.36

**CHAN 9151**

**Antonín Dvorák**

String Sextet in A major Op.48

**Bohuslav Martinu**

Serenada II, for two violins and viola  
String Sextet

**CHAN 8771**

**George Enescu**

Octet in C major Op. 7

**Richard Strauss**

Sextet from `Capriccio` Op. 85

**Dmitri Shostakovich**

Two pieces for String Octet Op.11

**CHAN 9131**

**Eugene Goossens**

Concertino for String Octet, Op.47

Phantasy Sextet

**Frank Bridge**

String Sextet

**CHAN 9472**

**Themes of Grainger**

**Percy Grainger**

Molly on the Shore, Shepherd's Hey, The  
Immovable Do, others.

**Kenneth Leighton**

Fantasy Octet on themes of Grainger

**Christopher Laurence** bass

**CHAN 9346**

**Felix Mendelssohn**

Octet for String in E flat major Op.20

**Joachim Raff**

Octet for Strings in C major Op.176

**CHAN 8790**

**Franz Schubert**

Octet D803 (Op.166)

**CHAN 8585**

**Louis Spohr**

String Quintet in A minor Op.91

Potpourri on Themes of Mozart in B flat major  
Op.22

String Sextet in C major Op.140

**CHAN 9424**

**Johann Svendsen**

String Octet in A major Op. 3

Romance for Violin and Strings Op.26

**Carl Nielsen**

String Quintet in G major

**CHAN 9258**

**Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

Souvenir de Florence Op.70 for string sextet

**Alexander Glazunov**

String Quintet Op.39

**CHAN 9387**

(continued)

### **Popular & Light Collection--Serenade**

**James Moody**

Bulgarian Wedding Dance

**Gabriel Faure**

Pavane arranged Moody

Romance arranged Moody

Au Bord de L'Eau Op. 8 No. 1 arranged Moody

**Edvard Grieg**

Norwegian Dance Op.35 No. 2 arranged

Langford

**George Martin**

Adagietto

**David Reilly**

Aviator

Serenade

**George Frideric Handel**

Sonata arranged Moody

**Claude Debussy**

Preludes Book 2: Bruyeres aranged Moody

**Felix Mendelssohn**

On Wings of Song arranged Langford

**Various vocal/early**

My Lagen Love aranged Reilly

**Lennon McCartney**

Two Beatle Girls: Eleanor and Michelle arranged

Martin

**Tommy Reilly** harmonica

**CHAN 8486**

### **Chamber Collection**

**Maurice Ravel**

Introduction et Allegro for harp, string quartet,  
flute and clarinet.

**Claude Debussy**

Danse sacree

Danse profane

Sonate for flute viola and harp

**Camille Saint-Saëns**

Fantaisie Op.124 for violin and harp

**Albert Roussel**

Serenade Op.30 for flute, violin, viola, cello, and  
harp.

**Skaila Kanga** harp

**CHAN 8621**

### **Chamber Collection--Academy Classics**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

Divertimento in F major K.522 `A Musical  
Joke`: Finale

Divertimento in D major K.334/320b: Minuet  
and Trio

**Antonín Dvořák**

Humoresque Op.101 No. 7, arranged Latchem

**Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

Souvenir de Florence Op.70

**Edvard Grieg**

Two Elegiac Melodies Op.34

Lyric Suite Op.68 No. 5: At the Cradle

**Maurice Ravel**

Pavane pour une Infante Defunte

**Edward Elgar**

Salut d'Amour Op.12

**William Walton**

Henry V: `Touch her soft lips and part`

**George Gershwin**

Porgy and Bess: Summertime

**Johann Pachelbel**

Canon

**Sergei Rachmaninov**

Vocalise Op.34 No.14

**Claude Debussy**

Clair de Lune

**CHAN 9216**

# The Dallas Morning News

Scott Cantrell

Special Contributor

Published: 06 October 2015 12:00 AM

## Classical music: British ensemble a fine opener for Dallas Chamber Music Society

Was there ever a finer tunesmith than Franz Schubert? That thought repeatedly came to mind Monday night, as the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields Chamber Ensemble served up a too-rare performance of the composer's glorious Octet. Tunes fairly tumble over one another; when the music isn't songlike, it dances — sometimes both at once. The ensemble of clarinet, bassoon, horn and string quintet supplies almost symphonic richness, but also marvelous varieties and combinations of timbres.

Opening the Dallas Chamber Music Society's 2015-16 season, the British ensemble supplied a program that should have spread smiles all over the audience. And it was good to see Southern Methodist University's Caruth Auditorium practically full.

Ostensibly, Schubert's Octet continues the tradition of Mozart's light-entertainment serenades and divertimenti; its immediate model was Beethoven's Septet, an early and unusually lighthearted work in that composer's oeuvre. But Schubert's wonderfully catchy tunes are woven through lively counterpoints and surprisingly piquant harmonies.

Then there's that finale, startlingly announced with nervous tremolos and anxious fanfares; all is not sweetness and light. The return of the same gestures before the coda is one of the most chilling moments in music.

Just occasionally, I thought Monday's performance a little too aggressive — the third-movement Allegro vivace, especially. And just occasionally clarinetist Timothy Orpen and hornist Stephen Stirling protruded a little too much in the balance. But this was an ensemble of first-rate musicians, technically superb, generously expressive, and obviously enjoying themselves. Everything was nicely buoyed and lovingly phrased.

It was more of the same in the string Divertimento by Mozart (in D major, K. 136/125a) that opened the program. First violinist Tomo Keller led a performance smartly sprung and elegantly detailed.

A chamber ensemble arrangement of Strauss' tone poem Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks was entertaining enough, if hardly compelling. Dating from 1954, the work of Viennese composer Franz Hasenöhr, it reduces an orchestral showpiece to a quintet of violin, double bass, clarinet, bassoon and horn. It was played with the greatest panache, but Orpen was sometimes too aggressive, and the horn part often obliterated the bassoon's contribution.

*Scott Cantrell, former classical music critic of The Dallas Morning News, has also written for The New York Times and numerous music magazines.*

## British chamber ensemble enthralls in George Mason University performance

By Stephen Brookes, Published: October 22, 2012

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields is one of those orchestras so well-known that it's become a modern musical icon, its name synonymous with impeccable musicianship, irreproachable British taste and performances so polished that they fairly gleam. There are several permutations of the group, and eight of its string players — who make up the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble — arrived at George Mason University's Center for the Arts on Sunday for an afternoon of mostly Romantic-era music that lived up to, and maybe even surpassed, the hype.

Led by violinist Thomas Bowes, the players opened with Johannes Brahms's String Sextet No. 2 in G major, Op. 36. It's a lush and deeply felt work — Brahms wrote it, the story goes, as a sort of farewell to his great love Agathe von Siebold — and the group approached it with tenderness and restraint, letting the music's deep dramatic lines unfold in a deliberately paced, utterly natural way. Their sound is sweet and pure, their ensemble work airtight, and the playing purred along effortlessly. Even if you find Brahms a little long-winded at times — as some among us do — when his music is played this elegantly, you really don't mind.

The next two pieces on the program formed an intriguing pair: octets written exactly 100 years apart, both by composers still in their teens, and each the diametric opposite of the other. Dmitri Shostakovich was only 18 when he wrote his 1925 Prelude and Scherzo for String Octet, Op. 11, and it's a shockingly accomplished piece, brash and spiky and modernist and already full of the composer's trademark bite. The ensemble gave it a brilliant performance, with edges so sharp that you could almost cut yourself on them.

The contrast could not have been greater with Felix Mendelssohn's warm and embracing Octet for Strings in E-flat major, Op. 20, written in 1825, when the composer was 16. It's often referred to as a musical miracle, and the description is apt: Not only is the thing absolutely captivating from beginning to end, but in its sweeping, symphonic scope, it feels like the work of a completely mature composer. The ensemble played it with obvious pleasure, turning in a luminous and often-breathtaking performance that won the musicians a standing ovation.

Brookes is a freelance writer.



## Music Review: Musical seduction of Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble



By [Michael Huebner](#) | [mhuebner@al.com](mailto:mhuebner@al.com)

on October 24, 2012 at 2:48 PM, updated October 24, 2012 at 3:05 PM

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Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble

The [Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble](#) won't blow you out of your seat. Nor will these eight London-based musicians try to impress you with their all-too-obvious virtuosity.

Instead, they seduce listeners into musical rapture with long, overarching paragraphs, subtly accented phrases and intricate melodic interplay.

A euphonious blend such as that displayed Tuesday at the sold-out Brock Recital Hall concert is a rare find. True, the group is halfway through its U.S. tour. And true, each have played this music by Brahms, Shostakovich and Mendelssohn countless times. But it all sounded spontaneous, as if the culmination of years of rehearsing.

Brahms' String Sextet No. 2 in G, Op. 36, demands an egalitarian approach to pull off its sculptural textures. Against a rocking, two-note backdrop, violinist Thomas Bowes and cellist Stephen Orton sang

and soared. The Scherzo's combined understatement and vibrancy led to an Adagio in which melodies merged and receded in a woody, earthy blend.

#### **ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE**

Tuesday, Brock Recital Hall  
Samford University

Presented by Birmingham Chamber Music Society and Davis Architects Guest Artist Series

★★★★★

The full textures and argumentative temperament of Shostakovich's Prelude and Scherzo, Op. 11, contrasted with moody reflection, then morphed into full-blown fury in the tense, heart-racing finale.

Like the ensemble's performance at the [Alys Stephens Center](#)'s Jemison Concert Hall in 2005, it ended with Mendelssohn's Octet for Strings in E flat, Op. 20. The Shostakovich work was also heard then, but as memorable as that concert was, there can be no comparison with hearing these works in Brock Recital Hall, an acoustical space ideally suited for groups this size.

Big, thick chords led to touching pianissimos and dizzying waves of dynamics in Mendelssohn's Allegro moderato. Gentle, caressing conversations between low and high strings in the Andante gave way to a kinetic slow burn in the Scherzo and furious-paced buildup in the finale.

An encore, a stylish arrangement of Gershwin's "Summertime," was the group's way of commenting on the Southern environment in which they were touring.

# The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2007

## Young Mendelssohn, Lush and Sure

Mendelssohn instructed that his Octet for Strings in E flat be played in a symphonic style with strict observation of dynamic markings, a wish that the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble observed during a bristling performance of the work at the Morgan Library & Museum's intimate Gilder Lehrman Hall on Thursday.

### MUSIC REVIEW

VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

The octet is usually played by two quartets united for an evening. But from the nuanced, organic and cohesive interpretation of this chamber ensemble, created in 1967 as an offshoot of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, it was clear that these are musicians with a history together.

Kenneth Sillito, the group's excellent first violinist and director, varied his tone from sweet to muscular. His colleagues followed suit, ably capturing the work's various moods, including a lovely Andante, a sotto voce Scherzo and a fiery Presto.

Listening to the glorious octet, which Mendelssohn wrote at a precocious 16, it's easy to imagine the awe that his family and friends must have felt while hearing the work's premiere in 1825 during a Sunday morning musi-



HIROYUKI ITO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Kenneth Sillito, left, leading the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble at the Morgan on Thursday evening.

### Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble

Morgan Library & Museum

cale in the garden house of the family home in Berlin.

In contrast, Shostakovich's propulsive, eerie Prelude and Scherzo (Op. 11), which the ensemble also performed on Thursday, had a less than enthusiastic reception from his professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

This early work, which already displays vintage trademarks of the composer, was played with vigor and brio.

Melodies from diverse parts of Europe opened and concluded the concert, with a lively reading of Dvorak's folk-tinged Sextet for Strings in A (Op. 48) beginning the proceedings. As an encore, the ensemble rewarded the appreciative audience with a warmly heartfelt performance of "Last Spring," the second of Grieg's "Two Elegiac Melodies."

MUSIC

## Satisfaction every step of the way

By HERMAN TROTTER

News Music Critic Emeritus

The progression of works in this opening concert of the 2006-07 Ramsi P. Tick Concert Series was from the obscure to the ubiquitous, with musical satisfaction every step of the way.

Also, the works were composed by successively younger composers, opening with the String Sextet in A, Op. 48 by Dvorak, written at age 37. One doesn't think of any Dvorak works as being obscure, but the Sextet is rarely heard, and it was good to hear it played by this distinguished English ensemble, which is so committed to the piece that they have recorded it.

But even in this authoritative performance it was clear that this was music written before Dvorak had found his true musical voice. It had such unique Dvorak gestures and earmarks as a Dumka move-

### CONCERT REVIEW

#### Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Orchestra

Part of Ramsi P. Tick Memorial Concert Series on Monday night in Holy Trinity Lutheran Church.

ment, a Furiant, and that typical gentle warmth and questioning quality. It was all quite pleasant, but Dvorak's scoring often produced cloudy textures, leaving the feeling that the music might have been more communicative if it had been written as a quartet.

Shostakovich was only 19 when he wrote the short, terse Prelude and Scherzo, Op. 11, for string octet. But he clearly knew what he wanted to say and how to have the strings say it. The music's textures were lean and clean, with a steely modernity, an obvious logic of form, and a very convincing statement of the sardonic musical gestures

that fueled the intriguing Scherzo. It was brilliantly played.

Mendelssohn's Octet for Strings in E-flat, Op. 20 may just be the most mature and satisfying work ever written by a 16-year-old composer. Yes, yes, I know about Mozart. It's music of full sound but crystal clear textures and an irrepressible, bubbling joie de vivre.

All these qualities were reflected very persuasively in the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields' sparkling performance.

The Andante was ethereal and pensive but still probing, and although the skittering Scherzo might have benefited from crisper articulation here and there it still had its mesmerizing effect. The performance of the Presto had a light, driving bite that made it the perfect conclusion to this extraordinary work.

**MUSIC REVIEW**

# St. Martin delivers rare treat

By **CHARLES WARD**  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

**F**OR Houston Friends of Music audiences, curiosity is a good thing.

The Friends' board salivates at the chance of hearing something other than the usual Beethoven, Brahms and, these days, Shostakovich.

So for Thursday's return of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble, the Friends opted for a work rarely if ever performed in Houston: the Sextet for Strings (1924) by Erwin Schulhoff, a Prague-born composer of German-Jewish descent who died in a Nazi concentration camp.

It was the central work of a program that, though chronologically compact, suggested the enormous upheaval of European art music around the turn of the 20th century.

The evening opened with the conservatism of Dvorák's String Sextet in A Major, Op. 48 (1948). Its style was familiar and comfortable. Its references to folk music provided zest: In the second movement, the academy's exaggerated push and pull of rhythm added swagger to the carefully regulated music.

Dvorák's Sextet also established the academy's style of playing for the evening.

At softer dynamics, it was superb: gentle, deeply expressive, tonally lustrous (especially the silvery tone of the violins in high notes). At peak moments, including loud dynamics, the

Please see **MUSIC**, Page E9

"Superb: gentle, deeply expressive, tonally lustrous."

"The academy players performed with singular beauty and control."

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE E3**

ensemble scrambled the sound with loose tuning and thick textures.

Schulhoff's Sextet (1924) suggested how widely and wildly varied classical style had become after World War I.

The first movement had the edgy, atonal intensity of expressionism. The following Tranquillo oozed with haunting beauty. The Burlesca confidently hid its folk roots behind the strong rhythmic drive. The very slow final movement had an eerie sense of doom that, in retrospect, seemed prophetic.

The youthful Octet for Strings (1900) by Georges Enesco — age 19 — sat in between. Its long arching opening melody vacillated, like folk music, between major and minor. The final section hinted that the waltz was its roots. The slow movement was a thing of beauty, fueled by an ostinato-like sequence of repeating chords that the academy players performed with singular beauty and control.

[charles.ward@chron.com](mailto:charles.ward@chron.com)

# Deseret Morning News, Salt Lake City

Friday, October 21, 2005

Ensemble does a top-notch job

By Edward Reichel  
Deseret Morning News

THE ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE, Libby Gardner Concert Hall, University of Utah, Wednesday.

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble is a world-class ensemble.

It has been at the top of its field since its start in 1967, due to the group being made up of first-chair players from its parent organization. Few chamber groups play with the same level of finesse, refinement, dramatic power and expressive scope.

The eight-member string group returned to Utah Wednesday, after more than a year's absence (it last played at Weber State University). The program of sextets and octets played in Libby Gardner Concert Hall put the ensemble's impressive artistry on display. **What distinguishes this ensemble from other chamber groups is its immaculate technique and flawless playing, which captures every nuance and turn of phrase, and elevates the music to a higher plane.**

The evening began with an exquisite performance of Alexander Borodin's Sextet. Only two movements of the work's four survive. These two movements have all the charm, grace and gorgeous melodicism that characterize Borodin's music. The sextet is as intimate as his quartets, and the ensemble captured the delicacy of the lyricism with its finely honed performance.

This was followed by Antonin Dvorak's Sextet in A major, op. 48. This work, as much as any other by Dvorak, belies the fact that the composer was inspired by Johannes Brahms. Dvorak's natural melodicism is imbued with an earnestness derived from Brahms, yet, in the Czech composer's case, this seriousness isn't as overpowering as it frequently is with Brahms.

The six musicians played the work with a fluency that emphasized the lyricism that courses throughout each of the four movements. Particularly striking was their interpretation of the second movement, "Dumka."

After intermission, the ensemble brought its other two violinists onstage for the two octets on the program — Dmitri Shostakovich's Prelude and Scherzo, op. 11, and Felix Mendelssohn's Octet, op. 20.

The Shostakovich is an early work, written when the composer was 19, around the same time as his First Symphony, with which it has much in common. The slow Prelude is weighted down with rich textures and intensely emotional writing, while the Scherzo is a wickedly demonic piece that runs amok with sarcastic wit. Both were played luminously.

**It was a cohesive, seamless and, above all, delightfully expressive and vivid performance.**

# Columbus Dispatch

February 28, 2005

MUSIC REVIEW | ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS

## Chamber ensemble plays every work just right

By Mary Hoffman  
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The highly polished recital Saturday night by the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble lived up to all expectations.

In fact, the performance by the eight Englishmen can be described only in superlatives.

The confident, consummate players relished the opportunity to immerse themselves and their listeners in the music: The Chamber Music Columbus event in the Southern Theatre featured superb shading and shaping throughout, with an expected attention to details and dynamics that enhanced the drama of each selection.

Inspired by a failed romantic relationship, *String Sextet in G Major*, Op. 36, was the second of two by Johannes Brahms.

The work continued to break new ground after it was written in the mid-1860s — with

its music for pairs of violins, violas and cellos.

The love affair may have ended badly, but the name of *Agathe* lives on, woven into the score and spelled out in the music. It was introduced Saturday night during the compelling opening movement by first violinist Kenneth Sillito and first violist Robert Smissen.

Through the string of noteworthy aspects in the reading, the ensemble threw itself into the sudden peasant dance and fiery conclusion of the "Scherzo," defined the five variations of the "Adagio" and brought the contrasting nature of fourth-movement themes and fugue into clear relief.

The full complement of players took the stage for the second half of the concert.

*Two Pieces for String Octet*, Op. 11, by Shostakovich preceded Mendelssohn's *Octet in E-flat Major*, Op. 20.

Written 100 years apart, both are youthful

works. The first is a suggestion of what was to follow; the other is a full-blown masterpiece.

Dmitri Shostakovich was creating his first symphony as a student when he wrote his pieces in 1925: The opening "Elegy," in memory of a friend and poet, is angry as well as somber. The "Scherzo" that follows is sharp and satirical, like the biting wind of winter.

The performance was appropriately dark and vigorous.

Energy and exuberance dominate the Felix Mendelssohn score, with all facets beautifully captured by the spellbinding execution, which brought the deeply appreciative audience to its feet.

The exquisite ensemble flowed like honey through the "Andante," spun out delicate threads during the "Scherzo" and charged through the "Presto" with aplomb.

The encore offered a captivating arrangement of Gershwin's *Summertime*.

# St. Martin ensemble delivers magic of Russian masters

By KEN KEATON  
Special To The Daily News

A full house of music lovers enjoyed a superb performance Wednesday night at The Society of the Four Arts from one of the most renowned chamber ensembles.

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble has been performing since 1967. Eight of the principle players from the ASMF Chamber Orchestra make up the ensemble, which is dedicated to larger chamber works — sextets through octets. Those works are normally played by a string quartet with guests, but the group considers it an advantage in performing these with musicians who all routinely play together.

The proof of this is in the playing, of course, and the proof was not lacking Wednesday.

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble presented a rich program of two sextets and two octets, and their Apollonian musicianship was a delight throughout. Perfectly controlled balances and sonorities, gorgeous phrasing, incisive rhythms and precise intonation served the music ably.

The first item on the program was Alexander Borodin's *Sextet in Two Movements*. Borodin was a member of The Mighty Five, a group of Russian composers who felt that their music should reflect their Russian heritage. While Borodin eventually devoted himself to this, *Sextet* was completed early in his career. In

fact, the first movement might well have been by Felix Mendelssohn — it displays not the slightest hint of his Russian origin. While the piece itself was less than satisfying, the performance was well played, if without any real fire.

The second sextet was Antonin Dvorák's *Sextet in A, Opus 48*. Dvorák, like Borodin, was dedicated to the nationalist cause, as can be seen in the two central movements of this work, a dumka followed by a furious. The ensemble played the work lovingly, with special highlights in the opening movement and the infectious furious.

The second featured two octets, both by teenagers. When he was a 19-year-old student, Dmitri Shostakovich created his *Prelude* and *Scher-*

*zo, Opus 11*. The work employs rich, quasi-orchestral sonorities; harsh dissonances; ghostly sounds sliding between pitches, and a primitive, Stravinskian rhythmic energy. The ensemble bit into the music like a starving man, and produced a whirlwind of sounds, wild and untamed.

The masterwork of the evening, however, was by Mendelssohn, who may well be the most astonishing prodigy music has known. He composed his *Octet for Strings in Eb major, Opus 20* at 16 — and he produced a work that stands in comparison with any chamber composition by any composer of any age. There are certain conditions during which it is impossible not to smile, and listening to the music of Mendelssohn is one of them. Proof of this

could be seen on the faces of all eight ensemble players preparing to perform this remarkable work. It was obvious they were going to enjoy this.

And enjoy it they did! They gave a memorable performance — the first movement had the requisite fireworks, guts and glory; the second was a marvel of mystery; the third was filled with elfin magic and lightness. The final was a fantastic climax, with so much swirling action that one thought the players had contracted to be paid by the note. The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble gave a supremely satisfying and memorable performance.

*Palm Beach Daily News*

February 20, 2004

"A superb performance...the ensemble bit into the music like a starving man, and produced a whirlwind of sound, wild and untamed."

"A supremely satisfying and memorable performance."

# St. Martin ensemble thrills the heart

By Sabine Kortals

Special to The Denver Post

Something special happened in Boulder this Valentine's Day.

A full house at Macky Auditorium luxuriated in a consummate performance by the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble. Indeed, this memorable University of Colorado Artist Series concert is sure to stand out as one of the area's top events this season.

Saving the best for last, principal players of the larger Academy of St. Martin in the Fields orchestra rendered a lush, passionate performance of Felix Mendelssohn's familiar and invigorating Octet for Strings in E-flat major.

But this fine work of a 16-year-old composer is more than mere youthful energy and inspiration. Alongside the dynamic leadership of violinist Kenneth Sillito, the ensemble also revealed the darker

shades and shadows beneath the score's sunny exterior.

In fact, the *sui generis* quality of these tightly-woven chamber musicians is not only their fresh and bold exploration of a continuum of emotions, but also their ability to communicate a depth and sophistication of thought and persuasion.

The intense, susurrant opening of the Mendelssohn scherzo movement was wonderfully light and swift, soon to explode in a fiery, breathless *presto* finale that brought the audience to its feet.

What a tempo! The effect was electrifying, pulled off with remarkable control and precision.

Another highlight of the evening was Antonin Dvorak's Sextet for Strings in A major. Delivered in the rare configuration of two of each violins, violas and cellos, the work is at once spontaneous and tranquil.

These qualities were rendered with great care and consideration

to the composer's overarching spirit of optimism.

Although each member of the urbane, all-male cast is unmistakably a master in his own right, violinist Harvey de Souza most aptly displayed the personality of the group in the Dvorak selection. His charming facial expressions articulated the sheer joy of bringing to life the fanciful humor, buoyant momentum and undulating melodies of the flowing work.

Especially in the dancing "Dumka" movement, followed by the breakneck "Furiant" — together comparable in temperament to the Mendelssohn scherzo — the group deftly balanced a sense of pathos with bursts of euphoria.

Each of the more substantial works on the program was introduced by a shorter piece. Alexander Borodin's cerebral Sextet in Two Movements opened the evening — here, the ensemble first hinted at its range of interpretative capacity to be unleashed later.

And in Dmitri Shostakovich's turbulent Prelude and Scherzo, the players showcased the rich, moaning sound of cellists Stephen Orton and John Heley, as well as the group's unified, delicate pizzicatos and combined virtuosity. Best of all, they gave full reign to the long musical thoughts that shape both movements.

The distinctive artistry of these London-based musicians is arguably the precise type of classical music performance needed today. The combination of intellectual understanding, exceptional technique and impassioned delivery negates any need for gimmicks.

The music speaks for itself, thrilling and enlightening audiences along the way, offering a respite from time and space — and the mundane.

The Artist Series continues on March 3 with Macedonian pianist Simon Trpceski in a solo recital. Information: 303-492-8008.

"Something special...one of the area's top events this season."

"Electrifying...the group deftly balanced a sense of pathos with bursts of euphoria."

"The distinctive artistry of these London-based musicians is arguably the precise type of classical music performance needed today."

## A studied Shakespeare and splendid strings

### SHORT TAKES

#### St. Martin in the Fields

It was a night of blue-blooded string playing as the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble tested its nurtured pianissimos and delicate spiccato touch on the superb acoustics of Carnegie Music Hall.

The Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society concert Monday featured the seldom-heard combination of sextets and octets.

The star, of course, was the Mendelssohn Octet. It seems to open up to life's possibilities at the start, the first violinist climbing to the heavens while the cellos descend into the netherworld. The Academy group responded to the music with picture-perfect lightness in the scherzo and exuberance in the finale.

The Mendelssohn was preceded by Shostakovich's two-movement Octet, also composed in the early years of a composer's career. It was an intriguing comparison. Where Mendelssohn shimmered, Shostakovich struck with a vivid muscularity, allowing for a virtuoso technique by leader and first violinist Kenneth Sillito. When Shostakovich virtually exploded into the scherzo, Sillito flamboyantly sprayed glissandi amid the edgy chords.

Mendelssohn also played a part in inspiring movements from Borodin's String Sextet, which displayed a similar approach to the high tessitura and recurring spiccato passages that tickled the fancy. But this piece didn't have the warmth of the second half of the program.

The Dvorak String Sextet seemed to follow suit, the epitome of refinement and control despite numerous folk influences. It was an aristocratic reading of one of the Czech composer's best works.

—Review by Jane Vranish,  
Post-Gazette

"The Academy group responded to the music with picture-perfect lightness in the scherzo and exuberance in the finale."

# Chamber ensemble shines

By Edward Reichel

Deseret Morning News

**THE ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE, Weber State University, Thursday.**

Since its founding in 1967, the Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble has become one of the foremost proponents of larger chamber works.

A group that spends most of its time touring rather than playing close to its home in London, the eight-member string ensemble led by Kenneth Sillito has just embarked on its most recent U.S. tour. Its first stop on its 12-city tour was Ogden, where it played to a sizable audience Thursday at

Weber State University.

The well-chosen program included one of the more seldom heard works in the chamber literature — Georges Enesco's Octet in C major, op. 7.

This undeservedly neglected early work by the composer, who is best remembered for his two Romanian rhapsodies, is wonderfully rich in its harmonic scheme and thematic material. The musicians gave a shimmering performance of this demanding piece, capturing its youthful vitality as it manifested itself in the bold themes and sweeping lines.

Particularly breathtaking was the muted slow section of this one-movement work. The exquisitely phrased passages were played with subtle expressiveness that brought out the romanticism of the music without sentimentalizing it.

The concert opened with Alexander Borodin's Sextet in Two Movements. This elegantly

refined piece was performed seamlessly by the six of the musicians, who exhibited impeccable ensemble playing.

The Borodin was followed by Antonin Dvorak's Sextet in A major, op. 48. The sextet has a wealth of thematic material. Filled with the romantic sensibilities of Brahms, the music is tempered with Slavic earnestness. And the work's serious side shone through in the group's interpretation.

The entire work is expansively laid out. Dvorak gave the sextet a symphonic sweep, and the players indulged the audience through their eloquent reading that emphasized the weightiness of the music without letting it become heavy-handed. It was a superb example of consummate artistry.

The ensemble also treated the audience to a delightful encore — a Scherzo for octet by Dmitri Shostakovich. Written when the composer was still a teenager, the scherzo teems with a robust boldness that vents itself in the at times strident harmonies and ragged lines.

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"A shimmering performance...the exquisitely phrased passages were played with subtle expressiveness that brought out the romanticism of the music without sentimentalizing it."

"A superb example of consummate artistry."

## THE PLAIN DEALER

Cleveland, Ohio

Thursday May 1st, 2003

"The academy players invested the Mendelsohn with elegant phrasing and interplay as well as elfin delicacy in the scherzo."

"The Shostakovitch burst from the stage with all of its darkness and compassion richly intact."

"The academy players captured the splendor in an account full of purposeful drama and poetic grace."

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

# Ensemble's concert has passion, grace

DONALD ROSENBERG  
*Plain Dealer Music Critic*

REVIEW

## Academy of St. Martin- in-the-Fields Chamber Ensemble

Teenagers can be challenging. They can also be inspired.

The string players of the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields Chamber Ensemble embraced both aspects of youth Tuesday at Fairmount Temple Auditorium by devoting half of their program to precocious composers who would go on to become major musical figures, Shostakovich and Mendelssohn. It is amazing to consider how their artistic personalities were so firmly established before they were 20.

Mendelssohn's Octet, Op. 20, deserves its place as one of the most beloved pieces in the string repertoire. What a feast of exuberance, tenderness and virtuosity.

Hints of great Mendelssohnian things to come are present, though the depth of expression and command of musical elements are already remarkable.

Not as well known is Shostakovich's Prelude and Scherzo, also an octet, which comprises two movements of intensely felt and diabolical music that will sound familiar to anyone who has heard the composer's symphonies.

The opening movement claims elegiac poignancy; the scherzo is biting and sinister, with characteristically propulsive rhythms.

Both pieces brought out the best in the ensemble, which has been a stellar London institution since a group of British musicians got together in 1959 at St.-Martin-in-the-Fields, a church in Trafalgar Square, to perform minus conductor.

Eventually, Neville Marriner emerged from the first-violin chair to conduct larger pieces, and the academy made numerous superb recordings of classical fare.

Marriner left the group long ago to pursue a conducting ca-

reer. But the ensemble remains a first-rate exponent of musical cohesion, clarity and stylistic truth.

As led Tuesday by first violinist Kenneth Sillito, the academy players invested the Mendelssohn with elegant phrasing and interplay, as well as elfin delicacy in the scherzo. The Shostakovich burst from the stage with all of its darkness and compassion richly intact.

The Cleveland Chamber Music Society's final program of the season also included sextets by more mature composers.

Only two movements of Borodin's Sextet in D minor exist, but they show the 27-year-old chemist and future creator of the melody that would become "Stranger in Paradise" to be a skilled purveyor of Russian folklorism and passion.

The short slow movement is a particularly haunting piece that the academy musicians shaped with hushed control.

Dvorak was on the verge of being a Czech household name when he wrote his Sextet, Op. 48, and no wonder. The score abounds in his distinctive fervor, warmth and charm, with a final theme-and-variations movement of rustic beauty. The academy players captured the splendor in an account full of purposeful drama and poetic grace.

And their encore, Grieg's "Last Spring," was a lovely whisper.

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