

Chamber music as a way of life: Busch Trio

After attending a string quartet performance, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote: (...), one hears four intelligent people exchanging views (...). Indeed, the essence of chamber music is communication. We have known this for a long time; even from before the time Goethe wrote that lofty phrase. Small wonder, then, that encounters in the world of chamber music often develop into friendships. The reverse is far more unusual: when, from among a group of school friends with a range of everyday hobbies, a chamber music ensemble emerges that reaches the highest level on the international stage in very little time.

This is how the Busch Trio came into existence, an ensemble which in recent years has developed into a leading piano trio. Mathieu van Bellen (violin), Ori Epstein (cello) and Omri Epstein (piano) met in London during their studies at the Royal College of Music. They became friends and, before long, were inseparable. They played football, listened to music together – and played music together. Right from the start, all their conversations revolved around music.

Mathieu, Ori and Omri won several prizes in international competitions as soloists and graduated from renowned academies of music in Britain. Their shared passion for music however remained their strongest bond. 'This trio is the fruit of a friendship that has existed for years', is how Omri Epstein describes the essentially spontaneous process by which the trio came into being from 2012.

Its name, 'Busch Trio', is derived first and foremost from Mathieu's violin, an 'ex- Adolf Busch' G.B. Guadagnini (Turin, 1783), but also from Adolf Busch, the shining example for the young trio. We should also note that in 1935, violinist Adolf Busch, together with Rudolf Serkin (piano) and Hermann Busch (cello), made a legendary recording of Schubert's Piano Trio in E-flat major – one of the most important works in the literature for trios, and a core piece in the Busch Trio's repertoire.

Great names such as the teacher of chamber music Eberhard Feltz, pianist Sir Andrés Schiff and the Artemis Quartet have also contributed to the development of the Busch Trio, as has the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Brussels. The Busch Trio members have now reached a stage in which they primarily learn from each other, during joint rehearsals that largely consist of sharing thoughts and views about music.

Despite the 'effortless musicianship' (The Times) and great emotional sensitivity ascribed to the Busch Trio by the press and their loyal fans, these three musicians are guided by the head as much as the heart when playing music, being very much aware of what they are doing. 'The more you know, the more freedom you feel' is one of the key maxims of the ensemble.

What is also unusual is that the Busch Trio, while not strictly part of the historically informed performance movement, do play on instruments with gut strings. They decided to do so because gut strings provide a different type of articulation and a better sound, which cannot be achieved using modern metal strings due to the greater pressure they require.

Today the Busch Trio members live in Amsterdam; their extremely intensive rehearsal practice would simply be impossible otherwise. 'We live like monks in a monastery', they confess. 'We don't do this for ourselves, really, but for our best friends' – comments such as these reflect both their serious attitude and their sense of togetherness. That should be taken quite literally: the Busch Trio also go on holiday together and spend a lot of time together when they are not playing music.

Since its formation in 2012, the Busch Trio has regularly appeared on major stages and festivals throughout Europe. They have been recognised for their work and received important awards in the Netherlands and Germany: The Kersjes Award and the Ensemble Prize at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival. Their many years of fruitful collaboration with the record label Alpha Classics have delivered notable recordings of the complete works of Dvorák and Schubert.

With the return of concerts, the Busch Trio can look forward to concerts at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Wigmore Hall, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées as well as numerous tours of the US.