

From Trafalgar Square to Shaker Square: CCMS presents St. Martin's Chamber Ensemble

by Daniel Hathaway



On Tuesday, October 18, London's Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble will return to the Cleveland Chamber Music Series at Plymouth Church in Shaker Square to play works by Purcell, Brahms, and Enesco.

Not many musical groups are so closely associated in spirit and substance with a building as is the Academy of St. Martin with the grand parish church built to the plans of architect James Gibbs in 1720.

Only the second church to occupy its central London site on Trafalgar Square, St. Martin's, inspired by Greek and Roman temples, established an architectural style that was widely applied to ecclesiastical architecture during the restoration of the City churches after the Great Fire of 1666 by such architects as Christopher Wren. It has shared its real estate with the monument to Admiral Horatio Nelson after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1808, with the National Gallery of Art, completed in 1838, and until their eviction at the turn of the 21st century, with a flock of 35,000 feral pigeons, not to mention protesters demonstrating *en masse* for multiple causes (like the 100,000 Pakistanis who poured into Trafalgar Square one Sunday in the 1970s when I decided to visit St. Martin's for the first time).

Determined to serve as a cultural center as well as an organization dedicated to religious, societal, and justice issues, St. Martin's became a thoroughly modern

Anglican organization in the mid-20th century. As its website notes, “ From London’s first free lending library to the first religious broadcast, St. Martin’s has broken new ground in defining what it means to be a church.”



St. Martin’s musical program took a great leap forward when John Churchill, then Master of Music, joined Neville Marriner in 1959 to found a small string orchestra *sans conductor* named “The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields,” which made its debut on November 13, 1959, an important moment in the revival of Baroque performances in England. Since then, it has welcomed winds, but remains variable in size and makeup in order to perform music from all periods.



The string orchestra of St. Martin-in-the-Fields played a key role in the revival of Baroque performances in England. The orchestra has since expanded to include winds. It remains flexible in size, changing its make-up to suit its repertoire, which

ranges from Baroque to contemporary works. And in 1988, it got rid of all those hyphens in its name.

Neville Marriner continued to direct from the podium and from the leader's desk, holding the title of Life President until his death in 2016. Pianist Murray Perahia was named Principal Guest Conductor in 2000. Then, in a major organizational change, Joshua Bell was appointed Music Director in 2011.

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble, which will perform in Cleveland on October 18, was created in 1967 “to perform larger chamber works with players who customarily worked together, instead of the usual string quartet with additional guests.” Led by violinist Tomo Keller, the Chamber Ensemble performs in all configurations from string quintets to octets, and in various other combinations including wind players. The ensemble makes regular tours of Europe and North America, and has released more than 30 CDs.



The extraordinary range of St. Martin's musical life is suggested by the “About our Music” page on the St. Martin's [website](#).

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 13, 2022.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)