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FIDELIO TRIO

Thursday 15 December 2022, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

Piano Trio in G minor, Op.17

Clara Schumann

Piano Trio No.2 'Nighttown'

Alexander Goehr

Interval

Piano Trio in E flat, Op.100, D929

Franz Schubert

Piano Trio in G minor, Op.17

Clara Schumann
(1819-96)

Allegro moderato
Scherzo. Tempo di menuetto
Andante
Allegretto

Making her public solo debut at the age of eleven, Clara Wieck went on to become one of the most prominent pianists of her day, in solo, chamber and concerto repertoire. She toured widely, particularly after her husband Robert Schumann's death, including several visits to London.

Her father, Friedrich Wieck was a renowned piano teacher, and carefully prepared his daughter for the life of a concert soloist. Robert Schumann came to study with him in 1828, and the growing affection between Robert and Clara was viewed by Friedrich with increasing alarm. His doubts about Robert's character and career prospects, combined with his belief that domestic responsibilities would ruin Clara's own career, led him to put in their way every obstacle that he could think of. They were finally able to marry in 1840, after a prolonged legal battle to proceed without Wieck's consent.

Clara's compositions are mostly for solo piano, but also include three groups of songs and a youthful piano concerto. Although she performed chamber music frequently – she played Beethoven's 'Archduke' Trio at the age of fifteen, Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet was a mainstay of her repertoire, and she had a regular duo partnership with the violinist Joseph Joachim – she produced just two chamber works of her own: this Trio and a set of three romances for violin and piano.

She wrote the Trio between May and September 1846, noting in her diary after a rehearsal in October: "There is nothing greater than the joy of composing something oneself, and then listening to it. There are some pretty passages in the trio, and I think it is fairly successful as far as form goes." But when it was published nearly a year later she compared it unfavourably with Robert's D minor Trio, finding her own work "effeminate and sentimental."

It is nothing of the kind. Strongly argued on a large scale, it is also expertly laid out for the three instruments, with the piano not allowed to dominate, though the cello sometimes takes on a more subordinate role.

The first movement is predominantly lyrical, with a song-like opening melody for the violin, and the piano's more elusive second theme, linked by a strongly rhythmic figure suggesting a purposeful undercurrent.

The short-long rhythm which characterises the scherzo's main theme gives it an endearing charm. Like many similar passages in Robert's work, the central trio section sounds at first as though it is in a two-in-a-bar rhythm; it is only after a while that we realise it has been in triple time all along.

The gently flowing theme that opens the third movement is almost a song without words. It leads to a passionate central section with a mazurka-like rhythmic character, after which the opening theme returns sung by the cello over a richly scored, sonorous piano accompaniment.

The finale has a vigour and drive which is belied by the violin's deceptively gentle opening theme, supported by the piano. This reveals its inner strength later when it becomes the basis of an extended fugal passage which Mendelssohn greatly admired. Clara continues to explore different facets of the theme right up to the final bars. It is easy to hear why the Trio was her most frequently performed work in the nineteenth century, and it remains her greatest achievement as a composer.

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Piano Trio No.2 'Nighttown'

Alexander Goehr
(b.1932)

Entrance, Admonition of a Grand Lady, Tripudium, Lament, Departure

The 'Entrance into the Nighttown' episode (Circe) of James Joyce's *Ulysses* is made up of a series of fantastic and grotesque visions. One of these is a parody of Flaubert's description of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to St Anthony. I have set Joyce's words elsewhere and my Admonition of a Grand Lady is loosely based upon my setting of that. The centrepiece of the Trio is a Tripudium, a sort of wild and vulgar dance in the brothel. Here Joyce quotes an old musical song: 'My Girl's a Yorkshire Girl' (which you can't hear in my piece!) This leads to a Lament and a final Departure which echoes the preliminary Entrance. Possibly the programme is reflected in my composition, in its characters and gestures. But in the final analysis it is, hopefully, just music.

© Alexander Goehr

Piano Trio No.2 in E flat, D.929

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro moderato

Allegro moderato

The last few years of Schubert's life were extraordinarily rich in terms of the sheer variety and creativity of his output. Not only did he complete *Winterreise* and *Schwanengesang*; he also wrote three Piano Sonatas, the *Moments Musicaux*, and a host of other works for piano solo, piano duet, chorus and solo voice. And he turned, for the first time since his teenage years, to the piano trio, completing two major compositions in that medium: the Trio in B flat D.898, and this Trio in E flat D.929. It seems likely that these pieces were written with specific performers in mind: the string players Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Joseph Linke and the virtuoso pianist Karl Maria von Bocklet, who was to give the first public performance of the *Wanderer-Fantasie* D.760 in 1832.

The origins of the Trio are somewhat unclear – since Schubert worked on two pieces in the same genre concurrently, and since contemporary concert programmes rather unhelpfully don't include the keys of works performed, it is difficult to untangle which piece is being referred to in the surviving documentation. However, the E flat major Trio has the distinction of including a number of musical features borrowed from a Swedish song, 'Se solen sjunker' ('The Sun is Sinking'), which Schubert heard performed by the singer Isaak Alberg Berg (later the first teacher of Jenny Lind) in November 1827. Many of the most distinctive melodic characteristics of the Trio's Andante theme, including the echoing octave jumps, were taken from the song; and this then informs the whole of the rest of the piece, just as Schubert used his own songs as the basis for similar works such as the 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet in D minor D.810, and the Wanderer-Fantasie D.760. The memorable slow movement theme even makes an appearance in the finale.

The Trio is a substantial and highly dramatic work, conceived on an almost symphonic scale – Robert Schumann remarked that it 'went across ordinary musical life of the day like an angry thunderstorm'. It was included in the famous 'Privatkonzert' of March 1828, a showcase of Schubert's music which, he proudly reported to his publisher, Probst, had been extremely well-received. He sent the manuscript to Probst the following month, even agreeing to a substantial cut of 99 bars in the finale (which featured an even longer presentation of the slow movement theme) to have a chance of getting it printed. In the event, it took Probst so long to issue the score that it did not appear until October 1828. Schubert died in mid-November, before his copy reached him.

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FIDELIO TRIO

The Fidelio Trio comprises Darragh Morgan, violin, Tim Gill, cello and Mary Dullea, piano. Shortlisted for the 2016 Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards, the Fidelio Trio broadcast regularly on BBC Radio 3, RTÉ Lyric FM, WQXR, and has been featured on a Sky Arts documentary.

Since their debut at London's Southbank Centre, they have regularly appeared at the Wigmore Hall and Kings Place, at festivals including Spitalfields, Cheltenham, St. Magnus and Huddersfield. In Ireland, they regularly perform at National Concert Hall, Dublin, Kilkenny Festival and Belfast Festival as well as Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre, Beijing Modern Music Festival, Hong Kong Chamber Music Society, Singapore, Bangkok, Porto, Paris, Venice, Florence, Johannesburg, Harare, New York City, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Boston.

Their extensive discography includes most recently a *Gramophone* magazine Editor's Choice of Chamber Music by E J Moeran, a composer with whom they are closely associated and the release of premiere recordings on Mode Records of music by Gerald Barry. Forthcoming in 2022 are a portrait CD of Ye Xiaogang and Robert Saxton's recently commissioned piano trio. Other releases include: two French albums of Ravel and Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Chausson and Satie; Philip Glass *Head On & Pendulum* on Orange Mountain; Korngold and Schoenberg (*Verklärte Nacht* arr. Steuermann) for Naxos; the complete Michael Nyman Piano Trios for MN Records; multiple releases on NMC, Delphian Records including portrait CDs for composers such as Luke Bedford, Piers Hellawell and Michael Zev Gordon. Their previous release of French Piano Trios for Resonus was also a *Gramophone* magazine Editor's Choice.

The Fidelio Trio has given masterclasses at Peabody Conservatory, Curtis Institute, NYU, Central Conservatory Beijing, and Stellenbosch Conservatorium South Africa. They have been artists-in-residence at St. Patrick's College Dublin City University, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, the State University of New York, SUNY and Tufts University, Boston.

Composers that the Trio has premiered music by include Anna Clyne, Robert Saxton, Toshio Hosokawa, Charles Wuorinen, Johannes Maria Staud, Michael Nyman, Gerald Barry, Donnacha Dennehy, Joe Cutler, Ann Cleare, Simon Bainbridge, Judith Weir, Alexander Goehr, David Fennessy and Kevin Volans.

Inspirational musicians the Fidelio Trio has collaborated with include Nicholas Daniel (oboe), Richard Watkins (horn), Joan Rodgers and Patricia Rozario (soprano), Rachel Roberts (viola), and with spoken word, author Alexander McCall Smith, T.S. Eliot prizewinning poet Sinéad Morrissey and actor Adrian Dunbar.

They often perform Beethoven's Triple Concerto including recently with KZN Philharmonic Orchestra South Africa and RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland and are Artistic Directors of their annual Winter Chamber Music Festival at Belvedere House, Dublin City University.