

# ngtrio

## LEGACY 2

**ROBERT SCHUMANN ( GER; 1810 – 56)**

**Sechs Stücke in kanonischer Form, Op. 56 (1845)**

**arr. piano trio by Kirchner**

*III Andantino*

*IV Innig*

Duration: 7'

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Schumann excelled at miniatures. He also revered Johann Sebastian Bach, and in the spring of 1845 he and Clara were engrossed in the study of fugue. They had just moved to Dresden, where Robert was taking up the position as conductor of the Dresden orchestra; and the first thing they acquired for their new home was a pedal piano – an instrument with an extra row of pedals for playing bass notes, the closest thing you could get to an organ at home. It was wildly popular during that nineteenth-century craze for the organ and for playing symphonies and concertos in piano reduction. Robert was also teaching Clara counterpoint, and wrote this delightful little cycle of pieces for her.

They've been arranged for many instruments – this version for piano trio was made by Theodor Kirchner, one of Schumann's students during his brief tenure at the Leipzig Conservatory.

**TABEA SQUIRE (NZ; b. 1989)**

**Der Tanz (2022)**

*I - Vierteltenschwein*

*II – Auftakteule*

*III – Und (verwirrend melodios...) Die Säule*

Duration: 7'

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The Dance, by German poet Christian Morgenstern (1871 – 1914)

In the composer's own translation:

A four quarter pig and an upbeat owl  
met in the shadow of a pillar  
that stood in the mind of its creator.  
And to the music of the fiddle bow plant  
the two, in dancing, gave each other  
foot and hand.

And upon his three pink legs  
the four quarter pig hopped gracefully,  
and the upbeat owl on her one  
swayed her head\* rhythmically.  
And the shadow fell,  
and the plant's music  
sounded bewilderingly melodious.

But the creator's brain was not of iron,  
And the pillar disappeared, as it had come  
and so then also our pair  
did travel back into their nothingness.  
One last stroke  
gave the violinerist\*\* –  
and then was nothing left as proof.

\*translation unclear

\*\*typical Morgenstern neologism

Übersetzung von T. Squire (1989 – )

German poet Christian Morgenstern, playful, metaphysical and slightly surreal, has been a favourite of the composer's family for generations. A graduate of the NZSM in Wellington, the youngest composer ever to be awarded the NZSO National Youth Orchestra Young composer residency, Tabea Squire has a growing (and often competition-winning) oeuvre of works for diverse ensembles that have been performed in all the major cities of New Zealand as well as overseas. She is also half German, bi-lingual with a German mother, and Morgenstern has inspired her before both in vocal settings and now in this piano trio, her first NZTrio commission - as she describes.

“Christian Morgenstern's poems just happen to be well-known in the family. The way he 'plays' with the language really suits the family humour, and in fact, many of us have a habit of writing humorous or facetious little verses in cards or letters, something I like doing too. Apparently I've managed to 'ape' Morgenstern's style pretty well, so evidently he's been a formative influence in more than one way. My brother even read one of his love-poems ('Es ist Nacht' – 'It is Night') at my wedding. As for the poem itself, I was skimming my book of Morgenstern poems for inspiration and spotted 'Der Tanz' because of the 'Fiedelbogenpflanze' or 'fiddle-bow plant'. The poem itself wouldn't lend itself well to vocal setting, but I've always enjoyed its whimsy, and chatting about it with my mother I realised that the four-quarter pig has three legs – like a grand piano – and the up-beat owl has only one – which could be the spike of the cello. With the 'fiddle-bow plant' rounding out the trio of characters, I realised it was too perfect, and the poem became the inspiration for the piece.

The first two movements are named after two of the poem's characters, and are directly inspired by them. As the four-quarter pig – surprisingly – only has three legs, I made the first movement a play of threes and fours. The upbeat owl, according to the poem, 'swayed her head rhythmically'; while my version of her became jerky and almost grotesque, she's still undeniably rhythmic. The third movement is a kind of meeting of various ideas – the fiddle-bow plant is referenced by her melodious music, as well as the pillar in whose shadow the entire tableau plays out. The main melody of the third movement also plays with threes and fours, but in a different way than the first movement. Being the final movement and, as it were, the 'summary' of the piece, I had to let the material do a bit more of the driving than in the other two movements. In a way, I summarised the last half of the poem, and then let the music play out along those lines, right up to the last bowstroke of the fiddle-bow plant.”

*Tabea Squire*

**WILLIAM BOLCOM (USA; b. 1938)**

**Trio (2014)**

*I. energetic*

*II. serene; molto sostenuto*

*III. strongly driven*

Duration: 17'

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When he was 11 years old, William Bolcom would board the Greyhound bus by himself for the 25 miles from his home town of Everett to the University of Washington to study with his new piano teacher, John Verrall, a longtime UW music professor. He did this every week for seven years, forming a passion for ragtime as well as the classics and developing a composing style that has now got him known as the most eclectic composer in America. It's ragtime he is best known for: he's personally credited with reviving the great ragtime composers and has been a busy cabaret pianist, performing with his wife, for over 60 years. Nobody knows the American popular music canon better than him. But it is also hard to find a composer with more classical credentials than him. Even before John Verrall he had a French piano teacher who was a friend of Poulenc, and so he grew up on the new Poulenc piano scores arriving from France; he then fell in love with Bartók and serial music, writing his first string quartet at the age of 11 and going on to study at the Paris Conservatoire with Milhaud and Messiaen. He walked away with the prestigious 2ème Prix de Composition and now has an enormous oeuvre that includes nine symphonies and four operas among masses of chamber music and songs: he has 30 albums of everything from his own music to Gershwin and Rodger & Hart; and an incredible list of awards that includes the National Medal of Arts, four Grammys, the Pulitzer Prize, six honorary doctorates, and his 2010 induction into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame.

Most important to him is his conviction that there should be no distinction between "popular" music and "art" music and this second piano trio, twenty years after the first, displays the same gleeful mix of moods and styles in a darker, more romantic kind of sound-world. Thrillingly dark massive textures in the opening move into Gershwin-like bluesy harmony in the slow movement and a finale that combines a machine-like piano with gorgeous curving melodies in the strings ... all dissipating, in waves, like a pebble chucked into a pond.

*"I want to know where to end up but I don't want to take the super highways, I want to go all the byways and interesting country roads. My composing is all about how you get from A to B, but in an interesting way." - William Bolcom*

**Franz Schubert (AUSTRIA; 1797 – 1828)**

***Piano Trio No. 2 in E flat Major, D.929 Op. 100***

*I Allegro*

*II Andante con moto*

*III Scherzando. Allegro moderato*

*IV Allegro moderato*

Duration: 43'

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*“There was a time when I talked unwillingly of Schubert, whose name, I thought, should only be whispered at night to the trees and stars.” – Robert Schumann*

This divine trio is one of the last compositions Schubert ever wrote. It was one of the very few of his works which he performed in public, at the one and only public concert during his lifetime, and remains as the only work published outside Vienna. The great irony of his genius was that despite how hugely prolific he was – more than 1,500 works including massive quantities of piano and chamber music, nine symphonies and over 600 songs – Schubert lived his whole life unrecognised by all but his small circle in Vienna: he had no post, no patron, received no commissions, made hardly any money, performed only in private, gave a lot of it away, and his music quickly became scattered far and wide among his publishers, family and friends. Not even Brahms, who idolised him, had any idea of the true quantity of his output and it was four decades before he began to be appreciated in the way that he deserved.

The E-flat trio is dated November 1827. He was already ill: diagnosed as typhoid fever at the time, it now is certain to have been syphilis, which had plagued him intermittently for years and which plunged him into the occasional depressions that so transcendently work their way into his songs. In March he had been a torchbearer at Beethoven’s funeral: the following November, 1828 at the age of only 31, he was dead. And yet that year is one full of masterpieces – Schwanengesang, the great C major symphony, the last set of impromptus, both piano trios, the C major quintet. He wrote both trios in quick succession and they are companion pieces: the B-flat sunny and lyrical, the E-flat dark and dramatic, and the one that Schubert himself preferred. He worked unusually hard on it – the manuscript is full of changes – and when it was ready to send to his publisher he gave it such a moving dedication: *“Dedicated to no one, save those who find pleasure in it”*.

It grabs our attention immediately. High drama combines with Schubert’s unmatched and endless gift for melody, especially in the heart-rending slow movement: the scherzo and trio are brilliantly impish and witty; and he excels even himself in a final movement of incomparable brilliance and beauty. Schubert has sometimes been criticised for not paying enough attention to formal structure, his melodies are so beautiful, but this trio utterly gives the lie to that. As Liszt once said, *“Such is the spell of your emotional world that it very nearly blinds us to the greatness of your craftsmanship.”*

Programme notes by Charlotte Wilson