

ngtrio

LEGACY 3

ROBERT SCHUMANN (GER; 1810 – 56)

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

arr. piano trio by Kirchner

V Nicht zu schnell

VI Adagio

Duration: 7'

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.

GAO PING (CHINA; b. 1970)

寻山 Searching for the Mountain (new commission 2022)

Duration:

Gao Ping, a composer-pianist, was born in Chengdu, Sichuan province of China and went on to study in the USA in the 1990's. In demand as a composer, he has received commissions and performances from around the world and his work has been performed in New Zealand by Michael Houstoun, John Chen, Christchurch International Arts Festival, New Zealand String Quartet, and NZTrio. Gao is a Professor and the Head of Composition at the Conservatory of Music-Capital Normal University in Beijing and previously taught at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand.

About this work Gao writes:

Since The Mountain, a duo-piano work written in 2004, the imagery and symbolism of mountain became seemingly inseparable from my musical thought. I feel there is a kind of metaphysical communication with the mountains, but I also physically confront mountainous places when opportunities arise. Mountains move me deeply, and inspire me just as much. During the summer of 2021, I travelled with friends to the Ganzi Tibetan area in the west of Sichuan. On our returning journey, we accidentally made a stop in a place where we met and conversed with some locals. Being urged and guided by them, we made a 40 minute drive curving along some dazzling cliffs, finally arriving at the top of a wild mountain. Standing at the summit, with its panoramic view and several famous peaks in great distance bathed in the twilight, all of us were stunned, sighing with astonishment. Next morning, we started off again in the dark at dawn making a repeat visit. When we reached the place, the sun was just starting to rise, gradually illuminating surrounding hills. The wild flowers that spread out in all directions, the pristine and rejuvenating chill of the morning air, all brought out in us another round of cheering and sighing! The local man who led the way told me that the place was called, in Tibetan, Jia-bu-si-jue, meaning "the path to the sacred mountain." The way to great heights is often difficult, and a great view is never reached without complex curves and bumps on the way. This is the solemnity of a mountain, and also its fascination. No wonder, almost in all cultures, mountains evoke in people a sense of sacredness. Searching for the Mountain was written under the effect of the memories of these journeys. The work, however, tries neither to narrate nor depict, though, for me, the music is, in an indescribable manner, permeated with all the impressions from that unforgettable experience.

In 2022, the NZTrio is celebrating its 20th anniversary. I made the work a dedication to this outstanding and aspiring ensemble, as a way of expressing praise, as well as mutual encouragement.

This new commission is generously supported by the Nicholas Tarling Charitable Trust

GUNTHER SCHULLER (USA; 1925–2015)

Trio (1984)

I Allegro vigoroso

II Adagio

III With Swing

Duration: 15:30'

Horn player with Miles Davis, beginning with 1949's album *Birth of Cool*, Gunther Schuller is one of the coolest jazz hounds in the business. Aaron Copland immediately poached him for a job at Tanglewood; shortly after that, at the New England Conservatory in Boston, he established the first-ever jazz degree programme in the world, going on to teach at the Manhattan School of Music and Yale; he's one of the jazz enthusiasts who got Ragtime going again in the seventies, winning a Grammy for his Scott Joplin and then touring it right across Soviet Russia as well as the White House; he's the author of several books which are bibles in the jazz world; he's equally keen on non-jazz contemporary, turning out the finest students in America by insisting that they take as many contemporary papers as the traditional classical; and he's revered for helping get Boston out of one of its most racially tense and violent periods, simply by getting kids from different backgrounds playing jazz together in marginalised neighbourhoods, helping to sow racial harmony.

It was also Gunther Schuller who coined the term "third stream", the space where classical meets jazz. This, therefore, is the ultimate Third Stream trio. Based on the principles of the twelve-tone row - these are the notes that you hear at the outset, with the strings pursuing the piano up and down the range of the keyboard - a melody emerges that each instrument picks up, and leaves, gently tossing and developing it between them. The cello opens the slow movement, accompanied by the piano, with a lyrical shimmering melody that is picked up on the violin, extremely high, and eventually brought down to earth by the piano. This leads into a whimsical, jazzy finale, marked by a walking bass over which the strings converse, complete with finger clicks and shimmering remarks from inside the piano. You can just about hear what they're saying.

There's a nice corollary to that twelve-tone row: after Schuller had chosen the notes, and showed the beginnings of his trio to a friend, this same friend (in amazement) brought out a precious fragment of Beethoven that he happened to own, no more than a few bars in Beethoven's own hand. They are the same notes chosen by Schuller. Coincidence, of course ...

Programme notes by Charlotte Wilson

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (RUS; 1840 – 1893)

Piano Trio in A minor, Op 50

I Pezzo elegiaco

II Tema con variazioni

III Variazione finale e coda

Duration: 47'

Although he learned music from an early age, Tchaikovsky graduated from a law school and took up a position with the Ministry of Justice for two years before he began professional music studies. He became one of the first students at the St Petersburg Conservatory when it opened in 1862, and when he graduated three years later he was offered a position at the Moscow Conservatory, which opened in 1866. There he came in contact with 'the Mighty Five', a group of leading composers who worked to revive an interest in Russian folk music.

Although Tchaikovsky's music remained based in the traditional European symphonic style, he blended in aspects of traditional melody and rhythm, developing a unique blend of the two. This was not always appreciated by either side of the Russian musical scene at the time, and Tchaikovsky suffered many crises of confidence.

One of his greatest supporters was the pianist Nikolay Rubinstein, who did an enormous amount to promote Tchaikovsky's music but was also one of his sharpest critics. When Rubinstein died unexpectedly in 1881, Tchaikovsky wrote his only Piano Trio as a memorial, titling it 'to the memory of a great artist'. By that time he had left the Moscow Conservatory, and was living on an annuity from his wealthy patron Nadezhda von Meck while travelling extensively in Europe.

The work was originally only in two movements, and the performers who tried it out persuaded Tchaikovsky to make extensive revisions, including separating off the final part of the second movement. It was first performed in Moscow in 1882, and rapidly became popular with the public. Even the composer, who was notoriously self-critical, wrote to his patron: "I can say with some conviction that my work is not all bad".

An elegy to his friend and mentor opens the Piano Trio, in a conventional sonata form movement that is full of richly romantic melodies and incorporates a funeral march. The theme for the second movement is said to be inspired by the memory of Russian folk music played at a country picnic attended by both men. It is accompanied by a dazzling and diverse set of variations. The final one, plus an extended coda form the last movement, which also recalls the elegiac theme of the first movement.