

States of Mind



Kenji Bunch (USA; b. 1973)

Swing Shift - Groovebox Variations (2002)

Kenji Bunch has emerged this past decade as one of the most prominent American composers of his generation. Hailed as a "composer to watch" by the New York Times, Bunch's works have been performed by more than sixty American orchestras. A versatile musician, he also enjoys an active performing career. As a founding member of the ensembles Flux Quartet (1996-2002) and Ne(x)tworks (2003-2011), Bunch has become one of New York's premiere interpreters of new and experimental music. Also a dedicated teacher, Bunch currently serves as Artistic Director of Fear No Music, directs MYSfits, the Metropolitan Youth Symphony's conductorless string orchestra, and teaches viola, composition, and music theory at Portland State University, Reed College, and for the Portland Youth Philharmonic.

Kenji writes: "I've never been a night owl, but living in New York City seems to encourage everyone to stay awake a few hours longer. The music of *Swing Shift* is an attempt to capture the unique essence of the city at her most exciting time of day - the hours between dusk and dawn. This is the New York of Edward Hopper's collective loneliness: smoky clubs, the reflection of streetlights on rain-soaked pavements. It is dedicated to anyone whose business stays open all night. *Swing Shift* was written for the Ahn Trio in April 2002 and commissioned by Brolly Arts, an organization dedicated to artistic collaborations. It was initially conceived to accompany a dance work with original choreography, and I have since reworked the music into a concert suite in six movements, played for the most part without pause."

Rachel Clement (NZ; b. 1972)

***Shifting States* (NZTrio Commission 2005)**

sabbia (sand)

filigrana (filigree)

bullicante (with bubbles)

millefiore (thousand flowers)

sommerso (submerged)

Rachel Clement studied composition with John Rimmer and John Elmsly at the University of Auckland, graduating with a Bachelor of Music (Hons.) in 1995 and a Master of Music (composition) with distinction in 1997. She has composed for a range of contemporary performers and groups, including 175 East and Stroma, lectured part-time in Composition at the University of Canterbury, managed the library of the Christchurch Symphony, and worked as the National Secondary Schools Arts Co-ordinator for Music (on behalf of the Music Educators of NZ, Aotearoa) under contract to the Ministry of Education. In 2005 and 2006 she held the position of Mozart Fellow at the University of Otago.

Rachel writes: "This set of short pieces is inspired by an interest in mid-Twentieth Century glassmaking, in which the process of changing state, or changing phase, essential to the production of the many types of art glass. Each piece is titled with the name of a different technique and express some of the processes of freezing, melting, vaporization, condensation and sublimation."

Programme notes by Charlotte Wilson

Alfred Schnittke (RUS; 1934 – 1998)

Trio

I. Moderato

II. Adagio

"Holding up a defiant, even joyous, two fingers to the denizens of stylistic purity" – The Guardian

Schnittke came from a long line of linguists. Originally from Germany, his family had been one of those to follow Catherine the Great to Russia, speaking German fluently and living in that curious German Soviet community that Lenin created on the banks of the Volga. His father was a journalist and translator, and the defining moment in his life came when the family was posted to Vienna for two years when he was 12 – the world of *The Third Man*, in the immediate aftermath of the second world war. And it's there that he fell in love with music, and found his vocation. Later writing: "I felt every moment there to be a link of the historical chain: all was multi-dimensional; the past represented a world of ever-present ghosts, and I was not a barbarian without any connections, but the conscious bearer of the task in my life."

And Vienna repaid the compliment. Although he only began his musical training in Moscow, later becoming a professor there, Schnittke turned throughout his life to the Viennese composers Mozart, Schubert, Mahler, rejecting Tchaikovsky and the other romantic Russians. He used to talk of “that certain Mozart-Schubert sound that I’ve carried with me for decades” and it’s a sound that shines on much of his music, “never too blatant”, and always through that inordinately modern, individual, historical Schnittke prism. But what he loved most was the Second Viennese School, and specifically the composer Alban Berg, and in 1985 he was delighted to accept a commission from the Alban Berg society of Vienna, for a string trio for Berg’s centenary – the trio that would eventually become this trio for piano, somehow lighter than the original and more classical and refined.

It begins with something that could be straight out of a Schubert piano sonata, or a Mahler symphony – a figure which we’ll be hearing in every possible permutation through this first movement, starting and stopping, fast and slow, insistent and intimate, tonal and atonal in turn (this is thrilling), going through a wonderful period of Mahler cantilena, then something that almost sounds like minimalism, and ending in an exhausted four-part minuet. The second movement is like all that, but sadder. It’s not only Berg’s centenary, it’s the 50th anniversary of his totally precocious death, and this is where you can hear Schnittke’s choral training coming to the fore. Russian dirge-like chorales follow late-Romantic lyricism; long string lines and crystalline piano writing all leading to a furious moment of catharsis and then sublimating into thin air. This is where Arvo Pärt comes from! Schnittke did it first – so beautifully.

Programme note by Charlotte Wilson

Stuart Greenbaum (Australia; b. 1966)

The Year Without a Summer (2009)

I: 1815 – and then the sky was filled with ash

II: 1816 – the year without a summer

Stuart Greenbaum studied composition with Broadstock and Conyngham at the University of Melbourne, and now holds a position at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music as Professor and Head of Composition. His music has overt connections to jazz, pop and minimalism but is equally grounded in the Western art music tradition, and his music is heard regularly in Australia and abroad.

In 2009 he was Australia's representative for the Trans-Tasman Composer Exchange, working in Auckland with NZTrio on this piano trio, *The Year Without a Summer*, which toured nationally for Chamber Music New Zealand, in Sydney for the ISCM World New Music Days (2010) and internationally at the City of London Festival (2011).

Stuart writes: “The eruption in 1815 of Mt. Tambora on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa was over four times as big as the eruption of Krakatoa later that century but perhaps not as well known. The ash and dust thrown up into the earth’s upper atmosphere further resulted in ‘the year without a summer’ in 1816. This was by all accounts a devastating ecological event that caused unseasonal cold temperatures and widespread famine.

The first movement of this trio is short and fast. It imagines a dark cloud of dust approaching from the distance, not knowing where it came from. Did it seem a premonition? How long did they think it would last? The longer second movement shifts forward to 1816 and contemplates the upheaval of people’s lives – of having their world turned upside down in one way or another and having to regroup and adjust to new circumstances.”

This piece was written for and dedicated to NZTrio. It was commissioned as a result of the Trans-Tasman Composer Exchange, a joint project of the Australian Music Centre and SOUNZ, the Centre for New Zealand Music with funding provided by the Music Board of the Australia Council.

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101 (1886)

I - Allegro energico

II - Presto non assai

III - Andante grazioso

IV - Allegro molto

“What a work it is, inspired throughout in its passion, its power of thought, its gracefulness, its poetry. No previous work of Johannes's has ever so completely carried me away.”

- Clara Schumann

Clara was not the only one to admire this piece. Brahms's circle was unanimous in its praise; Joseph Joachim declared that it was the best thing he had ever done. And it is easy to see why. Brahms, ever the slow-burner, perfectionist, feeling the constant heavy tread of Beethoven who came before, had by now honed his chamber craft with the two earlier trios and piano quartets, first string quintet, to be able to produce a grand, sweeping, four-movement piece that is at the same time a miracle of concision. It's one of the masterworks of an astonishingly productive summer. He'd just finished his monumental Symphony no. 4, aware perhaps it would be his last, and treated himself to a summer at Hofstetten near Lake Thun in the middle of the Swiss Alps, writing a postcard to his publisher: *“I'm happy with my decision [to come]; it's absolutely magnificent here. By the way, I'd also just mention that there's a ton of Biergartens.”*

Over the next few weeks, then, he would go on to produce three of his best-loved chamber pieces: the Cello Sonata Op. 99, bursting with energy; the radiant Violin Sonata in A major Op. 100; and this terse and powerful trio. It's Brahms the strict classicist - the manuscript shows he revised the tempi and the structure again and again, so as to satisfy perfect sonata form - but it's also Brahms the sweeping lyrical Romantic, rugged and brooding.

The first movement bursts in on a theme that urges us forward, ever faster, developed and returning in different guises throughout the piece including the second movement which is a gentle, sunny contrast, ending on a whisper after a canon between the piano and the strings. The sweet, slightly quirky andante is Brahms's love of irregular meters, in tribute to the Zweifacher folk dance of the area characterised by the alternation of two and three time; and the urgent theme of the beginning returns with a vengeance in the finale, with the darkest shade of C minor emerging into a triumphant major coda, and this time with a Hungarian tang.

One of Clara Schumann's piano students, Fanny Davies, was at the first play-through. She wrote: *"Madame Schumann asked the Master to allow me to listen. He growled and grunted his approval, and I sat in a corner of the little private sitting-room in a small hotel, drinking in every note, and marking my copy afterwards with the impressions I had received while Brahms had played from it ... looking eagerly, with those penetrating clear grey-blue eyes, at Joachim and Hausmann, for the start; then lifting both his energetic little arms high up and descending 'plump' onto the first C minor chord .. as much as to say, I mean THAT."*

Programme note by Charlotte Wilson