

# Homeland Three

## *Dumky*



**Ernest Bloch** | Three Nocturnes

**Vítězslav Novák** | Piano Trio No. 2, Quasi una ballata

**Frank Martin** | Trio sur des mélodies populaires irlandaises

**Ross Harris** | Prendre ses rêves pour des réalités (New NZTrio commission)

**Antonin Dvorák** | Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 90 “Dumky”

**Ernest Bloch (1880 - 1959)**

***Three Nocturnes (1924)***

*I. Andante*

*II. Andante quieto*

*III. Tempestoso*

*Duration 9'*

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*“Ernest Bloch has always seemed to me to be one of the Seven Wonders. Like Hercules, a world of ecstasy, of pain rested on his shoulders. He was cast by the gods in a superhuman mould — a prophetic scale of size and vision, of strength and vitality which exceeded the common mortals” - Yehudi Menuhin*

These three gorgeously atmospheric nocturnes date from Bloch's American period. He had been teaching in his native Geneva, achieving some fame with his Schelomo and Israel Symphony, also taking pioneering photographs of the Swiss Alps - photography and painting would remain an abiding passion - when he was offered and accepted a conducting job touring the USA with the Maud Allan dance troupe. It was a decision that would prove fateful and ultimately save his life. At the time, the dance company folded, stranding him in Ohio; but he soon found work at the Mannes School of Music as their first-ever composition professor and was such a success that barely three years later he was head-hunted for the first Directorship of the newly formed Cleveland Institute, then of the San Francisco Conservatory, where he was just about to move when he wrote these. This was also the year that he obtained American citizenship for his family. So when the 1930s found him once again back in Europe - he, a very overtly Jewish composer, had returned to Switzerland on a trust fund to compose - he was able to return to the USA with his family in 1939, just in the nick of time.

The first movement is impressionist, painterly Bloch with exotic scales and ethereal sonorities. The second is a gorgeous lullaby with the flavour of folk song. The third is muscular and driving, all bound up into a perfectly unified triptych.

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**Vítězslav Novák (1870 - 1949)**  
***Piano Trio No. 2, Quasi una ballata (1902)***  
*Andante tragico - Quasi Scherzo*

*Duration 17'*

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Novák was the modernist one of Dvořák's students. Born in small-town southern Bohemia, one of the many mediaeval small towns dotting the district beneath a large castle, he had a strange and brutal introduction to music - forced into piano and violin by his parents, then into music schools just as his father died. He got to the Prague conservatory in time to meet Dvořák, fatherly Dvořák, just as Dvořák himself had just been offered the job in America and was about to leave. But he had time to realise that this boy was a composer, not a performer, and set him on the folk music path that underpins his music for the rest of his life.

At the same time, the young Vítězslav (aligning himself with the Czech nationalist struggle, he had changed his name from Viktor) was becoming increasingly interested in new music trends beginning to sweep Europe. The very conservative teacher he was given as Dvořák's replacement only cemented his resolve. Away from the Wagner being produced at the Prague opera, away from Dvořák's mentor Brahms in the concert halls, towards new forms and the exciting new harmonies arriving from France. When he wrote this, he had just begun hosting an important new-music discussion group in his apartment which he would keep going until the revolution - this included Dvořák's son-in-law, Josef Suk - and the subject of their debates was always how to respect the old folk music while keeping it new.

This trio stands exactly at the junction of these two pressures. In one single movement, hence 'almost a ballad', its overall feeling of tumultuous pessimism mirrors his mood at the time; he even records that writing the trio was a painful process where many of his 'old scars surfaced and bled anew'. The opening *andante tragico*, tinged with folk song, leads into a heroic sort of allegro and, in turn, a sarcastic little scherzo before a super-dramatic finale in which the opening andante is reprised, all wrapped up in a sombre and funereal coda.

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**Frank Martin (1890 - 1974)**

***Trio sur des mélodies populaires irlandaises (1925)***

*I. Allegro moderato*

*II. Adagio*

*II. Gigue*

*Duration 16'*

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This jewel of a piece began as a commission from an American amateur musician Martin met in Paris. Unbelievably, the amateur did not like the result; expecting something more conventional by far, he had not bargained on a musical magpie like Frank Martin who was a mathematician before he was a musician, entirely self-taught, with an insatiable curiosity for every musical style he encountered, stretching from his early passion for Bach to the French impressionists, various exotic folk musics and eventually the serialist composers Schoenberg and beyond. When he wrote this – getting the tunes out of books in the Bibliotheque nationale and, undeterred by the lily-livered amateur, finishing it off over a summer at Cap Breton – his latest passion was eurhythmics, the study of the rhythms of the body, introduced to him by his friend Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. The rhythms and cross rhythms that you hear in this trio go on to underpin everything he wrote.

He uses at least ten authentic Irish tunes, all brilliantly woven together and on top of each other to make this gorgeous, moving, tuneful tapestry, lilting and colourful, saturated with the spirit of the dance. The first movement is a country peasant dance with its stomping accents, modal tune, a suggestion of pipes and drone. The cello opens the slow movement on a mournful little ballad, joined by the piano in a completely different tune that weaves into it seamlessly, all while remaining crystal-clear and distinct. And the finale is a traditional Irish medley all wrapped up in a sprightly 6/8 gigue.

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**– Interval –**

**Ross Harris** (b.1945)

***Prendre ses rêves pour des réalités* (New NZTrio commission)**

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Arts laureate Ross Harris is one of New Zealand's leading composers. He has written more than two hundred compositions including opera, symphonic music, chamber music, klezmer and electronic music. He has been a finalist in the prestigious SOUNZ Contemporary Award more times than any other New Zealand composer and won the award four times. Harris received a QSM in 1985 for his opera Waituhi with libretto by Witi Ihimaera, the CANZ Citation for Services to New Zealand Music in 1990 and the CANZ Trust Fund Award in 2016.

About this work Ross writes: “*Prendre ses rêves pour des réalités*’ is a piece of music which has some of the qualities of a dream. Musical ideas come and go like images in a day dream - with or without continuity or logic. Moments follow each other. The title translates approximately as ‘Let your dreams be your reality’.”

**Antonín Dvorák** (1841-1904)

***Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 90 “Dumky”* (1891)**

*I. Lento maestoso – Allegro vivace*

*II. Poco adagio; Vivace non troppo*

*III. Andante; Vivace non troppo*

*IV. Andante moderato (quasi tempo di marcia); Allegretto scherzando*

*V. Allegro*

*VI. Lento maestoso – Vivace*

*Duration 45’*

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Antonín Dvorák was born in Bohemia, and was given a good grounding in violin, viola and organ. He composed copiously but with little success until the composer Bedrich Smetana suggested he draw on his native folk music for inspiration. Dvorák found he was able to convey in music the deep affection he felt for his homeland and success and fame followed. By 1891, the year of the Dumky Trio, he had composed eight symphonies and 11 string quartets.

‘Dumky’ is the plural of dumka, a Ukrainian lament that Dvorák transformed into a musical form that was suffused with the beauty and colour of folk song and dance. The innovative Dumky Trio, the last of Dvorák’s four piano trios, is a set of six dumka episodes in varied keys, generally starting with a melancholy first section, followed by alternating faster, dance-like sections. The first three movements are in harmonically complementary keys and played without break, giving the effect of one long movement. The second three are in unrelated keys and separated by rests or fermatas. Thus, the overall impression is of a four-movement work. In creating this unusual deviation from traditional sonata form, Dvorák enjoyed unrestricted freedom to explore his themes as he wished.

The first movement opens with an impassioned recitative for piano and cello leading into prancing dance rhythms for piano and violin. The instruments then reverse roles. In the second movement, the cello plays a melancholy *Adagio*, which alternates with a light-hearted melody and gradually takes on a *furioso* character. The third movement sees the piano quietly announce the plaintive main theme in single notes before the fast, contrasting minor section. In the fourth movement, the cello offers a sweetly expressive melody that leads into a modified and playful version of the theme. It eventually accelerates before returning to the original slow theme. Both the tempo and the key relationships are reversed in the fifth movement and a fervent major key melody is followed by a dreamy episode in the minor. The slow melody of the final movement is unremittingly poignant, and is completely contrasted by what is, effectively, the first theme played faster. With a final flourish, the end comes suddenly.

The Dumky Trio was first performed in Prague on 11 April 1891 with the composer at the piano, Hanus Wihan (cello), and Ferdinand Lachner (violin). It was an immediate success.

*Joy Aberdein © 2012 for NZTrio*