

TRIPTYCH 1

Unquiet Dream



Benjamin Britten - Introduction and Allegro for piano trio

Lera Auerbach - Trio No. 2 Triptych - This Mirror Has Three Faces

Chris Cree Brown - The Second Triumvirate

Felix Mendelssohn - Trio in d minor Op. 49

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (U.K.; 1913 - 1976)

Introduction and Allegro for piano trio (1932)

Duration 15'

"6 May, 1932. Begin a new trio after breakfast – I'm putting my Concerto away for a bit."

So wrote the 18-year old Benjamin Britten, in his second year at the Royal College of Music in London, having won a scholarship to study there the year before. This was a marvellous time for him. He had been a fish out of water all through school: liked music rather than football; was mercilessly bullied. The saving grace was his viola teacher, Audrey Alston, a friend of his mother. She took him to the symphony concerts in Norwich and she was the one to introduce him to Frank Bridge, her friend, after his premiere of *The Sea* at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival 1924. Young Britten, age 14, was 'knocked sideways'. Bridge was impressed by the boy also, composition lessons began in London, and there began next to Peter Pears, the most important relationship in all of his life - a father-figure as well as a teacher with all of his many children, warm and supportive unlike Britten's own father (who was sceptical of his musical interests and refused to have a gramophone or radio in the house). And as a teacher he was excellent. Find yourself, he said, and be true to whatever you found. Britten continued on with the private lessons well after he joined the RCM and wrote this trio over just two weeks, premiering it at a Bridge household party in Eastbourne. Impressionistic, pastoral, the meditative cello centred on B gradually opens out into the rest of the ensemble, gathering energy and meaning so beautifully, before the energetic, folksy allegro. Owing something to Ravel, there's also something uniquely Britten about it, just as Bridge counselled. Then it was lost, never published, only revived for its public premiere at the Wigmore Hall in 1986.

Programme note by Charlotte Wilson 2024

LERA AUERBACH (RUS/USA; 1973-)

Trio No. 2 Triptych - This Mirror Has Three Faces (2011)

1. *Prelude (Left Exterior Panel) Moderato libero*
2. *First Unfolding (Left Interior Panel) Allegro appassionato*
3. *Second Unfolding (Right Interior Panel) Tempo di valse*
4. *Tell'em What You See (Center Panel) Allegro assai*
5. *Folding – Postlude (Right Exterior Panel) Adagio nostalgico*

Duration 24'

There are only two types of composers: composing composers; and decomposing composers.

- Lera Auerbach

That's one of Lera Auerbach's "Rooforisms". Poet, pianist, conductor, sculptor, with award-winning collections in English and Russian, she was only 17, a recent graduate of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory, when she defected from Russia to the USA. Invited on a short tour culminating in a concert in New York, she simply refused to get on the plane home, enrolled at Juilliard, and has remained in New York ever since, cutting a swathe through New York's notoriously choosy music, art and book scenes all at once. Now with multiple degrees from Juilliard and her year at the Music Hochschule in Hannover, she has a sizeable oeuvre (symphonic, choral, opera, chamber music) that is performed on the world's leading stages, from the Musikverein in Vienna to the Royal Albert Hall to the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall. Alex Ross describes her music as having an 'extraordinary power and intensity' and Lera Auerbach herself as a polymath for our times. And she regards all these forms - writing, music, art - as interconnected and vital to her creative process.

She says of this trio:

"I like the idea of exploring the dramatic, ritualistic side of music. In The Mirror With Three Faces, one can look at three different faces or roles of the same person or at three distinct personalities – each with its own face. Each character (i.e. instrument) may be isolated, in conflict, or in harmony with others and itself. This trio explores individuality and ensemble, harmony and conflict, one in three or three in one – that is the ambiguous nature of this work, structured in the form of a triptych.

Powerful opening chords announce the Left Exterior Panel, followed by a fractured, dreamlike weaving of the strings in and out of the tolling patterns in the piano. The First Unfolding is a complete contrast, an explosion of notes leading into a Schnittke-inflected waltz that fractures the mirror even more. The main movement bursts in manically – Tell'em what you see, wild and dissonant – before disintegrating into the simple sentimental melody of the adagio, the musicians instructed to imitate an old record. Lamenting glissandi bring this strange music to a close, to quote Francis Humphrys, the images in the mirror distorted beyond repair."

Programme note by Charlotte Wilson 2024

CHRIS CREE BROWN (NZ; 1953-)
The Second Triumvirate (2024)

After retiring from his position as Associate Professor at the School of Music, University of Canterbury, Chris Cree Brown has continued working as a freelance composer and sonic artist. Beyond writing conventional instrumental composition, Chris has incorporated electro-acoustic and computer music, and inter-media art into his compositions. He has twice been awarded the Mozart Fellowship at the University of Otago, and been part of the Artists to Antarctica programme. Several of his works have been finalist compositions in the SOUNZ Contemporary Music Awards, and in 2010 he won the award with Inner Bellow, for Clarinet and Fixed Media.

About this work Chris writes:

"The Second Triumvirate follows a short work written for NZTrio in 2009 which was titled The Triumvirate. Originally, music emerged from speech; rhythms were shaped from vocal rhythmic patterns and melody was fashioned by the modulations and inflections of speech. The musical phrase can be considered a sentence, and the musical argument can be interpreted as an imaginary conversation between the various musical voices. One can imagine conversations or perhaps quarrels between the three members of a triumvirate, discussing various agendas. Thus the title of these two works written for NZTrio imagines each instrumentalist as a member of a triumvirate perhaps attempting to dominate the remaining two members, or two of the triumvirate challenging the third."

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (GER; 1809 – 1847)
Piano Trio in d minor, Op. 49 (1839)
I. Molto allegro agitato
II. Andante con moto tranquillo
III. Scherzo. Leggiero e vivace
IV. Finale. Allegro assai appassionato

Duration 33'

Felix Mendelssohn was born in Berlin into a prominent banking family whose home was a gathering place for artists and intellectuals. He was an astonishingly gifted child, not only in music, having perfect pitch and an outstanding memory, but he could also paint well, write poetry, speak several languages, and he was a fine athlete. At the age of 16 he composed his heavenly Octet followed by the Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream the following year. Mendelssohn became recognised as the greatest living conductor and one of finest violinists and pianists of the day. He was tireless in his touring, conducting, and composing but his heavy workload tragically took its toll, contributing to his death at the age of 38.

The d minor Piano Trio was completed in July 1839 and premiered the following September. Its success was immediate and the composer Robert Schumann described it in *Neue Zeitschrift* as “the master trio of the age”. It has remained one of Mendelssohn's most popular instrumental works, applauded for its inspired melodies, mastery of form, rich part writing and warm emotional character.

The *Andante con moto tranquillo* second movement is an intimate song without words, a favourite form for Mendelssohn. The piano sings and shapes the melody to its own accompaniment before the strings enter. There is a minor variation of the theme in the middle section, adding a subtle suggestion of unease.

Programme note by Joy Aberdein 2012