

TRIPTYCH 3

Untamed Hope



Fanny Mendelssohn - Trio in D minor

Joan Tower - Trio Cavany

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Eva Bedggood - Ukiyo 浮世 - The Floating World (commissioned by Christopher's Classics)

Ethel Smyth - Trio in D minor

Fanny Mendelssohn (GER; 1805 – 1847), Piano Trio in D Minor, Op.11 - c.25'

Allegro molto vivace

Andante espressivo

Lied (Allegretto)

Allegro moderato

"Music will perhaps become Felix's profession, while for you it can and must be only an ornament"
(Abraham Mendelssohn, father, 1820)

In the mid 1980s, in Berlin, a researcher by the name of Marcia Citron finally gained access to the papers of Fanny Mendelssohn. She had to get past the curator, a fervent admirer of Felix, who called his older sister "just a housewife" and had blocked access to the archives for his entire tenure. She wore him down eventually. And what she found was astonishing – letters and diaries, all written in an Old German that she had to enlist the help of her landlady to decode, some 500 compositions that included a Cholera Cantata, dozens of songs and piano Songs Without Words, and her own wedding music (written while the rest of the family were celebrating the night before). Like Felix she turned out to have been a formidable pianist, so much so ("she plays like a man") that even the best musicians were terrified of playing for her: like Felix she had been composing since the age of ten; like Felix she was also a fine conductor; and it was not unusual for visitors, apparently, to find her actually the more talented of the pair. Felix saw this very well – they discussed all of their music together, they were inseparable – and he published many of her songs under his own name. Indeed, when he was invited to Buckingham Palace and Queen Victoria announced that she would sing, he had the embarrassment of having to confess that this favourite song of Her Majesty's was actually by his sister, and not his own.

And yet, Felix was sent off on a Grand Tour of the capitals of Europe to gain musical experience, and Fanny stayed at home to prepare her trousseau. Her husband (Wilhelm Hensel, the court painter) was supportive, luckily, and actually refused to marry her unless she promised to continue to compose: she

did, but she never published much, or imagined anything but a private audience at home. This is her last published opus, written for her sister's birthday on April 11, only a month before her death.

The first movement was called a masterpiece even at the time, with rumbling piano ushering in her gorgeous gift for melody. Two song-like movements follow – she quotes an aria from Felix's Elijah in the third – and the finale, opening with a stately Bach-like flourish, quickly turns passionately romantic before wrapping up the whole with perfection.

Joan Tower (USA; b. 1938), *Trio Cavany* (2007) - c.19'

The irrepressible Joan Tower, now 85 years old living in New York's Hudson Valley, still composing - she sits down religiously every day from 1:30 to 5:30pm, without fail, rain or shine - is as lively, incisive, and funny as ever. Interviewing her early June about one of her quartets sandwiched in between Haydn and Beethoven, she joked that she was 'the piece of dead lettuce' in the programme, roaring with laughter. (Actually, Haydn and Beethoven are her favourite composers and a big influence: she plays their sonatas on the piano.) She still teaches, 52 years at the famed Bard College and loves her students like children, having none of her own. Credits her exciting, colourful, rhythmic musical language to her childhood in Bolivia where her mineralogist father took the family for work. And as for being sandwiched into a programme of all-female composers, and the growing spotlight on what women have been doing all this time - "yes, very much so, it's thrilling. Music students have changed too, over the decades. They are less obedient now, and more questioning. Those are the ones that you want."

She herself is a feminist icon, famous for her Fanfares 'for the Uncommon Woman' in response to Copland's 'for the Common Man'. The first woman to receive the coveted Grawemeyer Award as well as Chamber Music America's National Service Award, the League of American Orchestras' highest award the Gold Baton, a rack of honorary doctorates and three Grammys, she is one of the most important composers living today. And this quartet bears testimony, named after the home states of its commissioners California, Virginia and New York.

She says of it: "It is in one movement and features all three instruments in solo and in combination." The NY Times says of it: "Opening with a quiet three-note cell on violin, the work moves through five distinct sections in a continuous 20-minute span. A slow, meditative passage for violin and cello leads to a surging section driven by prickly piano rhythms; a brusque scherzo is followed by an icy slow movement and an agitated finale."

What keeps you going, Joan Tower? "Music".

~ INTERVAL ~

Eva Bedggood (NZ; b. 2003), *Ukiyo* 浮世 - *The Floating World* - c. 8'

Eva Bedggood is a classical pianist, trumpeter and composer from Ōtautahi, Christchurch. Studying at both the University of Canterbury and Te Kōi NZSM for a double major in performance and composition, Eva now lives and studies in Melbourne at the Conservatoire of Music where she continues to collaborate with artists in many art forms and cultural diversity. In 2022 Eva was the Young Emerging Composer in Residence at the AWE festival alongside Gareth Farr, and has been a two time participant of the NZSO TODDS awards. Last year she won the Confucius Institute's China Crossing Award for her trio, Magnolia. Eva's passion for cross-cultural collaboration with her performance and composition has created a very enriching and budding career, being commissioned in media and film, jazz, ensemble, and recording projects.

About this work Eva says:

"Ukiyo 浮世 - *The Floating World* – refers to a Japanese proverb meaning “living in the moment, detached from the bothers of life.” Living in the moment is something scarce and fleeting in the turmoil of our society currently. There can be a constant push and pressure to achieve without little thought of the journey as we navigate towards our prospective destinations.

The simplicity of just existing and immersing yourself in a “floating world” or sense of calm is something I think music and other art forms can evoke, and this work seeks to embody that feeling; of floating, caring about the present and the state of our minds, rather than the busy and tumultuous bustle of life outside of our little moment of reprieve.”

Ethel Smyth (UK; 1858 -1944), *Trio in D minor (1880)* - c.28'

I Allegro non troppo

II Andante

III Scherzo. Presto con brio

IV Allegro vivace

The also-irrepressible Ethel Smyth wrote this far before she became a dame, a suffragette, the most important female composer in Britain. A passionate campaigner for votes for women - she argued that the disadvantages women faced in music stemmed from their lack of political voice - she wrote the suffragette anthem *The March of the Women* and is credited with teaching the corps of women (including her friend Emmeline Pankhurst) how to throw rocks: imprisoned in Holloway for just that, throwing a rock through the windows of the Houses of Parliament in 1912, Thomas Beecham described her leaning through the bars, conducting the chorus of women marching and singing outside with a toothbrush. But she already shows the same utterly brave and independent spirit.

A child prodigy in a typical wealthy Victorian family, she defied her father's wishes (a major general in the Royal Artillery, he forbade her to study music) and taught herself, enlisting the regiment composer in Aldershot to help twist his arm and announcing at 17 that she would be going to study in Leipzig. A major battle ensued: she won. The condition was that she must complete her courses or return. She disobeyed. She dropped out after one year, disappointed in Reinecke, and moved in instead with the Herzogenbergs to study privately - Heinrich and particularly his wife Elizabeth were close friends of Brahms - meeting, through them, not only Brahms but literally all the major composers of the day: Dvořák, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Clara Schumann. It was Brahms's friend George Henschel who introduced her, this 'jolly and amusing young Englishwoman who rides, hunts, fishes, swims etc, can jump over chairs back and all, and even before she took lessons, has been writing some quite charming little songs'. Brahms said: 'So this is the young woman who writes sonatas and doesn't know counterpoint!' She was lovely to him obviously, the great composer, but found him misogynistic. And she made her name throughout Germany with these charming little songs.

This is the environment in which she wrote her first piano trio, living with the Herzogenbergs age 21. The cello introduces the main theme. taken over by violin, developed equally in all three instruments and going through several highs and lows, pauses and climaxes, ending quietly. The piano drives the andante in what could be a Brahms intermezzo, the lullaby alternating with a stronger more forceful melody throughout, ending quietly once again. A light and fiery scherzo follows and the finale unites everything into one thrilling whole, intricate unisons alternating with beautiful solos, driving towards the epic final few chords.

Programme notes by Charlotte Wilson 2024