

## Dreamscape



**Roxanna Panufnik** | Around Three Corners

**Robert Schumann** | Piano Trio No. 1 in d minor

**Claire Cowan (NZ)** | wood : strings : hammers : flesh

**Charles Ives** | Piano Trio

### **Roxanna Panufnik (UK; 1968 - )**

Around three corners (1995)

*Duration 10'*

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Roxanna Panufnik bears a famous name: her father was composer and conductor Andrzej Panufnik, who was a hero of the Polish resistance during WWII, saved the Warsaw Philharmonic, and made international headlines when he eventually defected to the west. That was in 1954, to the UK: Roxanna is the daughter of his second wife, who was instrumental in helping him get a foothold in those foreign musical circles, and a growing reputation. By the time that Roxanna was born he was world famous; and she has been the keeper of his legacy, studying at the Royal Academy of Music and going on to win rare accolades - a coveted Ivor award, a commission for the coronation of King Charles III, the inaugural composer with the London Mozart Players. A lot of her work is choral and orchestral, often with liturgical and world music influences, often (as with this) ethereal and colourful and exotic.

She says of it:

*"I must have been going through a particularly contrary phase when I composed my piano trio Around three corners, commissioned by Barnes Music Society for Triangulus (hence the title). The theme appears in the very middle of the piece and is flanked by variations either side—almost a palindrome (another subconscious influence from Dad) but not quite as the latter variations are only retrograde in mood, key and tempo. Continuing the contrariety, the piece opens and closes with the strings accompanying the piano, providing a bustling bitonal harmonic middle to the piano's outer theme and bass line."*

## **Robert Schumann (GER; 1810 – 1856)**

### **Piano Trio No. 1 in d Minor, Op.63**

*I - Mit Energie und Leidenschaft*

*II - Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch*

*III - Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung*

*IV - Mit Feuer*

*Duration 30'*

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This is Schumann at his most romantic – the creative genius, the composing powerhouse, the Schumann who had swept Clara off her feet exactly 10 years before. He had already begun to show signs of his illness, the mental imbalance that drove him to attempt suicide in 1854 and would eventually kill him. It's been posited that this was nothing but the mercury treatment for syphilis. But he also had it in his family: fully three of the Schumann children were to succumb to the same thing; and back in 1844, which they spent unhappily in Dresden, he had been plagued by tinnitus, phobias, nervous fits and apprehension of death. The neurasthenic symphony no 2 and piano concerto date from that period and they had cancelled his contract with the orchestra, and hurriedly turned back to Leipzig.

And there, eventually, things began to look up. 1847 began with an extensive concert tour for Clara, the pianist, and they had a wonderful spring in Prague before Schumann himself was received rapturously in Berlin – momentous for him, as for the first time, he was possibly even more famous than his wife. They spent the summer in his beloved Zwickau, where he was born and grew up until leaving for university – this is where the Schumann centre is based now – and that's where he suddenly began composing again, completing not one but two piano trios in short succession.

No. 1 is the more mysterious of the two, inspired by Mendelssohn's piano trio in the same key, which Schumann revered. The first movement sets the mood, a surging mix of unrest and euphoria, with mainly the piano set against the violin with wonderful effects. The dotted scherzo and flowing trio centre section drive relentlessly upward. Crises in the melody – is this a clue to Schumann's recent experience? – lead into a beautiful third-movement duet between violin and cello; and all the uneasy parts of the whole are brilliantly wrapped up in a classic, heroic, fiery finale.

## **Claire Cowan (1983 -)**

wood : strings : hammers : flesh (2008)

*Duration 10'*

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*Commissioned by Trio Scintillatum with support from Creative New Zealand*

Now a Te Tumu Toi Laureate of the NZ Arts Foundation (2024), represented by a European talent agency following her grand-prize win at the Oticons Faculty International Film Music Contest, Claire Cowan is still delighting in chamber music just as much as her NZ pop collaborations, iconic kiwi storybook music, and larger-scale orchestral works that now include seven prime-time TV soundtracks, two full-length ballets and multiple 'Best Original Score' national awards.

Here, she explores the piano as a percussion instrument - its wood, its strings, its hammers - meeting the other wood and strings (and flesh) in four little minuets. Expect the unexpected!

Described by Claire Cowan herself with a poem:

*and you will wear my heart on your bow*

*you will speak my words*

*music like flowers will blossom from your fingertips*

*and they will see right through me*

## **Charles Ives (USA; 1874 – 1954)**

Piano Trio

*I - Moderato*

*II - TSIAJ ("This scherzo is a joke") Presto*

*III - Moderato con moto*

*Duration 10'*

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*"Music is life"*

You understand Charles Ives better when you consider his father George. George Ives was the youngest bandmaster in the whole Civil War, with the finest band in the Union: returning to settle in a small town in Connecticut, he turned it into the most musical town in the state. He was clearly a force of nature like his son, innately inquisitive and enquiring, so fascinated by music – any music – that he taught his boys to sing in one key while he played in another. He built instruments to play in quarter-tones, took his cornet out into the middle of a lake to demonstrate the sound over water, and set two bands marching round a park with different tunes for the sheer joy of what would happen when they passed. When young Charles first banged with his fists upon the piano, his father's only remark was to suggest he learn the drums. And so we get the composer known as the great Yankee maverick, decades ahead of his time, whose music is at once incredibly sentimental and nostalgic, rooted in old American band tunes and church music, and in another sense so avant-garde and freewheeling that it can even seem challenging today.

He went his own way in life, too, choosing a career in life insurance purely as a way of funding whatever he wanted to do with his music. It worked rather too well. He made himself a fortune, composing whatever he wanted and supporting whoever he wanted (he funded a number of other American composers secretly), only to find that nobody wanted to listen to it. But other composers venerated him. His influence on American music has been incalculable and when Stravinsky was asked his definition of a musical masterpiece, he chose a piece not by Mozart or JS Bach, but Charles Ives.

This trio is the freewheeling Charles Ives, harking back to his student days at Yale – the best days of his life, when he was known as “Dasher” Ives and earned D+ for everything but music. It’s stuffed full of references to folk songs and glee club tunes, especially the scherzo, which includes everything from the folk tune Long, Long Ago to My Old Kentucky Home, fragments of Dixieland and much more besides. He described it himself: *“The first movement recalled a rather short but serious talk by an old professor of Philosophy; the second, the games and antics by the students on a holiday afternoon; the last movement was partly a remembrance of a Sunday service on the campus”*. You may recognize the church hymn Rock of Ages, which he played as an organist many times.

*Programme notes by Charlotte Wilson*