Reverie

Hanna Kulenty | *A Cradle Song*
Adam Schoenberg | *Las Estrellas*
Leonard Bernstein | *Piano Trio*
Karlo Margetić (NZ) | *Icarus on Titan* (2026 NZTrio / SOUNZ Tarling Trust Commission)
Robert Schumann | *Piano Trio No. 3 in g minor*

Hanna Kulenty (POL; b.1961)
A Cradle Song (1993)

Duration 9' 40"

In 1985, Poland's most powerful music critic reviewed Kulenty's first work for orchestra and remarked: "*Gentlemen, listen and tremble!*"

Kulenty was then just 24, in her final year at the Chopin Academy in Warsaw. Post-grad study followed with the minimalist Louis Andriessen in the Hague, what she calls her "European trance music" phase. Her big break came in 1996 with her chamber opera *The Mother of Black-Winged Dreams*, which was as ground-breaking for its subject matter (multiple personality disorder) as for its structure in one long arc of increasing tension. It's a technique that she describes as a "polyphony of time dimensions" and she has maintained a busy freelance career ever since, travelling between premieres and festivals, guest lectureships and jury invitations all over the world.

And these core themes - time and tension - are nowhere better demonstrated than this mesmeric piano trio. Layers of arcs superimpose themselves upon each other, each travelling its own distinct path of growth and climax and decay, subverting what you might expect of a "cradle song" into a dense and visceral trance of quite astonishing intensity.

Adam Schoenberg (USA; b.1980)
Las Estrellas (2016)

Duration 15'

Adam Schoenberg is on a roll. The Los Angeles composer - no relation to Arnold - began receiving prizes as a student at Oberlin and Juilliard, and now, as head of composition and film scoring at Occidental College in L.A., has been named among the top 10 most performed living composers in the USA, with two Grammy nominations and an Emmy for his television work. Music runs in his blood. His father, Steven Schoenberg, is the wildly successful PBS composer and pianist (credits include Sesame Street), and growing up in the family apple orchards in Massachusetts, he was encouraged to improvise on the piano just like his father as a child. That is still the way he prefers to compose, seated at his 1916 Steinway baby grand with manuscript paper and a pencil - a method of music-making that goes a long way in explaining its immediate warmth and appeal. And the night sky - especially the beautiful clear winter nights of the west coast - are a frequent source of inspiration.

He was happy to explain the genesis of this piece while taking his kids to a baseball game one Sunday afternoon: that *Las Estrellas* (The Stars) picks up where the earlier *Luna y Mar*, written for his script-writer wife Janine, leaves off. "*The piece begins in a very gentle and quiet manner, and eventually becomes more rhythmic and uplifting. It is inspired by different constellations, and is designed to capture random patterns that one might see when navigating our sky at night.*"

Leonard Bernstein (USA; 1918 - 1990)
Piano Trio (1937)
I. Adagio non troppo - Più mosso - Allegro vivace
II. Tempo di marcia
III. Largo - Allegro vivo et molto ritmico

Duration 16'

This is Bernstein - Lenny - before he became the famous conductor and composer, merely nineteen years old, just another student at Harvard. It would be another five years before he produced his breakthrough Symphony No.1, and six before he stood in for Bruno Walter and made history at Carnegie Hall. And yet this, 1937, was already an important year. The child of Russian immigrants - his father had made his fortune patenting the hairdressing permanent wave machine - he had already had two triumphant debuts (including the Grieg piano concerto) and was thriving at Harvard. Studying under Walter Piston & co, he was president of the Harvard Glee Club, composing for them and for the various Aristophanes plays in the Aesthetics dept, as well as playing piano for the Harvard film society's silent film nights, unpaid.

And then two important things happened. One, George Gershwin died, the news arriving during lunch at the 1937 summer music camp where Lenny was a counsellor; he led an impromptu memorial on the piano in the mess hall. And he met Aaron Copland, quite by chance, finding himself in the next seat at a concert, and on Copland's birthday at that. Copland invited him to the party afterwards, where he impressed everyone playing Copland's own pieces at the piano, and his future began to be made. And in many ways this is his true Op.1 because although it is not his first piece - that was a psalm setting - it is his first premiere, performed by the all-female Madison Trio at Harvard. A sombre opening segues into material he later reuses in *On The Town*, a lively counterpoint reminiscent of Bach. A delightfully goofy march follows, and the finale shifts from a beautiful expressive opening to a cheerful high energy conclusion.

Karlo Margetić (NZ; b.1987)
Icarus on Titan (2026)
2026 NZTrio / SOUNZ Tarling Trust Commission
Duration 8'

Wellington-based composer Karlo Margetić is a graduate of the New Zealand School of Music, whose music has earned major honours, including the 2020 Enescu Prize for Symphonic Composition and the 2013 SOUNZ Contemporary Award for his NZTrio commissioned work, *Lightbox*. He has held composer residencies with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and Orchestra Wellington, with his works commissioned and performed by leading soloists and ensembles across Aotearoa and internationally.

About this work Karlo says: "*What would it be like to fly on an alien world, where nothing moves the way you expect? Titan, the largest moon of Saturn, has an atmosphere so thick, and a gravity so weak, that humans could feasibly fly in it, with wings of suitable fabric attached to their arms, and with the minor problems of life support and interplanetary travel surmounted. Had Icarus found himself in this situation, could he have flown freely, without fear of his wings failing in the heat of the sun? Our three brave musicians have embarked on an expedition to find out.*"

Robert Schumann (GER; 1810 - 1856)
Piano Trio No. 3 in g minor (1851)
I. Bewegt, doch nicht zu rasch - agitated, but not too fast
II. Ziemlich langsam - quite slow
III. Rasch - fast
IV. Kräftig, mit Humor - vigorously, with humour

Duration 26' 30"

This is Schumann at his most turbulent, in a busy and tumultuous year. In 1851, Clara was pregnant with their seventh child, just as Robert was offered the only full-time job of his lifetime - conductor and music director of the Düsseldorf orchestra, Düsseldorf on the Rhine. That's where he and Clara had celebrated their honeymoon, and suddenly - for it was she, the famous concert pianist, who had been supporting the family this whole time - suddenly it seemed as if divine providence had come to their aid. They wasted no time in moving the family, and after the big flop he'd had in 1850, an opera in which no one was interested, works began to pour out of him - large works for his new orchestra. The piano and cello concertos, massive now forgotten choral pieces, sundry equally forgotten overtures and the revision of his D minor symphony.

Alas, they quickly encountered a problem. It seems he was a hopeless conductor ; poor Schumann, too shy to stand in front of an orchestra. And then on top of that, there was the relentless progress of his mental illness which would end his time in Düsseldorf in 1854, throwing himself into the river he so much loved. Hardly any of the works he hoped for got a premiere and he was eventually pushed to resign. What to do?

He retreated into chamber music. All of his late masterpieces date from this year - both violin sonatas, the clarinet and viola fantasy works, this third and final trio - and you fancy that you are hearing the very agitation of his soul. "Agitated" is exactly how he marks the restless, yearning opening movement. The second movement is a bit like a slow reminiscence of a waltz. The third is an upward-sweeping rondo and the fourth springs and bounds, marked "powerfully and humorously," as if it is having a good time poking fun at itself. He faced his illness courageously until the end.

Programme notes for Kulenty, Bernstein, Schoenberg and Schumann by Charlotte Wilson © 2026