



SERAPHIM TRIO with CHRIS MOORE

Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Trio No. 43 in C Hob XV:27

Allegro

Andante

Finale.Presto

20 mins

Haydn's Trio No. 27 dates from his second visit to London in 1795. It is one of three trios dedicated to the pianist Therese Bartolozzi who, on the evidence of the keyboard writing here, was a musician of some skill. The opening movement begins with the topic of the fanfare, before the development visits contrapuntal terrain that is almost Baroque. Haydn was a master of the congenial slow movement, constructed for the drawing room: though this one also contains a couple of passionate interludes that are then subdued. The final movement is Haydn at his sparkling and exhilarating best, and making demands on piano and violin in particular that transcend the amateur origins of the genre.

Brett Dean (1961)

Imaginary Ballet

Dances and Interludes for Piano and String Trio

20 mins

1. Caprice

2. Obsessions

3. Interlude 1 – (Un)Quiet

4. Skittish

5. Interlude 2 – Chorale (Donnington Park in the Dark)

6. Interlude 3 – Elegy for John Curro

7. Shadow Dance

8. Stretto Dance

9. Postlude (Exeunte)

Note from the composer

Even though I was keen for this new work for piano and strings *not* to be defined by the Coronavirus and its endless accompanying news cycles, like the proverbial elephant in the room it was somehow there anyway while I was composing, winking at me rather rudely, flaunting its new, continuous cough, high temperature and loss of taste and smell.

During this past year or more of dramatic and unprecedented change, I found myself turning increasingly to music of energy, directness and verve in an effort to counteract consciously the at times almost overwhelming sense of global tragedy. These lockdown listening habits, often including guilty pleasures of old pop, rock and dance music favourites, somehow crept stealthily into this new piece.

Thus, what started out as an abstract chamber music piece for the classic piano quartet combination became an "Imaginary Ballet"; a suite of fast, rhythmic, dance-like movements. Bearing titles such as "Obsessions", "Stretto Dance" and "Skittish", these dances inhabit a

buoyant, bullish and effervescent space, full of both driving, reassuring repetitions and abrupt changes of tack, of surging waves of quasi-orchestral energy and slivers of sneaky secrecy.

“Caprice” opens the work with a provocatively bouncy, recurring major ninth motive in the piano, a gesture of openness and possibility in this time of shut-down, enticing the strings to join in one after the other. This motive reappears in different guises throughout the work’s nine brief, interconnected movements, informing note choices, melodic shapes and harmonic directions.

During the composition process, a series of slower interludes between the dances also began to emerge, bringing with them quietude and endowing the work with oases of silhouettes and shadows.

One of them is a chorale that doffs its cap to Charles Ives. It was inspired by the mysteriously foggy winter twilights of Donnington, the beautiful village in West Berkshire that I escaped to between lockdowns and where this piece was composed. Another is a short elegy in memory of my dear friend and former viola teacher, the remarkable Australian musician, John Curro. The Seraphim Trio’s violinist, Helen Ayres, will be playing the Australian premiere performances of “Imaginary Ballet” on a Smith violin which formerly belonged to John.

“Imaginary Ballet” is about 20 minutes long. May it intrigue you. Dancing is permitted as far as I’m concerned, socially distanced of course...

Brett Dean

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

Nocturne for solo violin and piano

4 mins

If we consider Nadia to be the more enduring and famous Boulanger sister, it is important to remember a few details about the younger Lili’s life. Lili was the first female composer to win the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1912 and, before her premature death at the age of 24, was already surpassing her models Massenet, Fauré and Debussy in harmonic invention and colour.

The exquisite *Nocturne* was written over two days in 1911 when Lili was 18 and taking a short break as she prepared for the Prix de Rome. It embodies the dark charm of night, and could be in part an elegy for Lili’s father, who died when she was six. The *Nocturne* is often paired with Boulanger’s *Courtège* (Procession) written 3 years later and partnered with the earlier work by her sister Nadia.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Quartet in G minor

32 minutes

Allegro

Andante

Rondo: Allegro

Mozart’s Piano Quartet in G minor is a seminal work, marking the birth of a new genre. The publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister commissioned it as the first of a set of three in 1785, but subsequently cancelled the commission, with the warning to Mozart to ‘write more popularly, or else I can neither print now pay for anything of yours.’ Such a response might seem peculiar to the modern ear – particularly for a work such as this, which is one of the glories of the repertoire – but it speaks to the perception of Mozart’s music as difficult at the time, as well as the nature of chamber music, which was largely conceived with the amateur audience in mind. In a 1788 review in the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, a critic observed that the quartet

‘[as performed by amateurs] *could* not please: everybody yawned with boredom over the incomprehensible *tintamarre* of 4 instruments which did not keep together for four bars on end, and whose senseless *concentus* never allowed any unity of feeling; but it *had to* please, it *had* to be praised! ... what a difference when this much-advertised work of art is performed with the highest degree of accuracy by four skilled musicians who have studied it carefully.’

Aside from any difficulties in its execution, the work also contains the hallmarks of Mozart’s mature voice: his increasing chromaticism, use of counterpoint, and interest in minor modes. The work’s tonality of G minor would have been considered less than ideal for the amateur market: less than a decade later, Haydn dissuaded Beethoven from publishing his Op. 1 piano trios, allegedly on account of the C minor tonality of Op. 1 No. 3. And G minor here, in Mozart’s hands, is a very serious matter indeed. Alfred Einstein described it as ‘the key of fate,’ and explains that ‘the wild command that opens the first movement, *unisono*, and stamps the whole movement with its character, remaining threateningly in the background, and bringing the movement to its inexorable close, might be called the ‘fate’ motive with exactly as much justice as the four-note motive of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony." Such gravitas is dispelled in an idyllic, highly embellished second movement, followed by a third movement in the key of G major, which unfolds as a visitation of joy.