

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 15 March 2024
7.30pm

Trio Isimsiz

Pablo Hernán Benedí violin
Edvard Pogossian cello
Erdem Mısırlıoğlu piano

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

D'un soir triste (1917-8)

Francisco Coll (b.1985)

Piano Trio (2020)
I. • II. • III. • IV.

Interval

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Trio in E flat Op. 70 No. 2 (1808)
*I. Poco sostenuto - Allegro ma non troppo •
II. Allegretto • III. Allegretto ma non troppo •
IV. Finale. Allegro*

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On the way to completing her last orchestral work, *D'un soir triste* ('Of a sad evening', 1917-8), **Lili Boulanger** made a version for piano trio. Her health always precarious, she may well have known that this would also be the last piece she could write out herself, and that she would not live to hear it, as proved indeed to be the case. The trio arrangement was first performed just under a year after her demise, with her sister Nadia at the piano. Another two years passed before the orchestral score received its première.

If closeness to death leads one to expect the music will be slow, heavy and sad, those are exactly the markings Boulanger places above the music from the beginning: *Lento, lourd, triste*. Though the piece is written in triple time almost throughout its ten-minute duration, there is the sense of a funeral march, intensified by the pulsing in the piano. Over this the cello unfolds a long and sombre melody, while the violin waits before launching its own. The two go on to carry the music through vigorous development into repose.

The trio by **Francisco Coll** came about as a result of a conversation he had with Trio Isimsiz's violinist Pablo Hernán Benedí, as he has recalled: 'Pablo asked if I would write a piano trio. I thought it was a great idea. It was clear they wanted a substantial work.' That is exactly what he came up with: a piece in four movements playing for 17 minutes.

Coll has also observed that the piano trio is a genre with the kind of historical connotations he likes to 'play with'. The four movements thus relate more or less to those of classical form: a statement of position, though crushed to under two minutes, followed by a slow movement, a jumpy scherzo and a lively finale. This is also an artist who enjoys getting himself out of 'the same traditional troubles composition has created over centuries', such troubles surely including the balancing and combination of struck strings with bowed. By keeping his players always on their toes, always ready to turn in an instant from *pppp* to *ffff* or vice versa, Coll keeps his sound fresh and spirited.

After the short opener comes a slow movement that occupies half the work's total duration. Gestures typical of flamenco swim as if into a great bowl of water, slowly turning and spectrally illuminated, then vanish again.

The third movement is, Coll says, a 'hallucinated fugue', in which the piano has a beautiful way of sparking off continuous glows in one or other of the strings. Running hemidemisquavers in the finale are periodically broken off for tango, introduced the first time by the cello.

Beethoven wrote the fourth and fifth of his six regular piano trios during an extended stay in 1808 at the Countess Marie von Erdódy's place in Jedlesee, then a village, now a suburb of Vienna. Not a serious contender in the 'Immortal Beloved' stakes, the Countess was a dear friend and confidante of Beethoven's; she also seems to have put together the arrangement with three wealthy supporters that guaranteed him an income as long as he remained in Austrian territory. Beethoven dedicated to her the two trios he had written while her guest, as he did again the pair of cello sonatas he produced under similar circumstances in 1815. The first of the trios gained a nickname as the 'Ghost', on account of its eerie slow movement, said to be a relic of a planned *Macbeth* opera, leaving the other without a handle. That may be why the second trio of this opus is so much more rarely played - which no doubt will give more than a few in this audience the rare pleasure of hearing a major Beethoven work for the first time.

The piece announces itself with a slow introduction, the instruments entering in turn to create an effect of anticipation: curtains slowly drawing apart, a sunrise. Eventually the piano discovers the way to the *Allegro* that must follow: leaps from B flat up successively to G, to A flat, and ultimately a full octave to B flat. The strings repeat this, and when they achieve the octave the music is off and away, if through occasional minor-key shadows. A second melody starts out from the rise from B flat to G, and then the music slows for a contrapuntal passage recalling the introduction. Once through this we are into the elegant region of the second subject, which, again through a sequence of lifts, folds back to the beginning of the *Allegro* or, the second time, on into the development. Third time round, at the close of the recapitulation, the same idea loses its thrust and allows a short reprise of the slow introduction. From here the *Allegro* picks up again for a gentle touch-down.

Instead of proceeding to a scherzo and a slow movement, Beethoven subdues these types in a pair of *Allegrettos*. The first is a set of double variations, alternately on contrasting yet related themes in C major and C minor. The second works on a theme suggestive of Schubert, though this whole movement is almost an arrangement of the *Largo* from Haydn's Symphony No. 88, replacing the bold interjections with a middle section that does not jolt the tone so much.

A fanfare initiates the *Finale*, whose development has more of this martial flavour, while the recapitulation seems loath to leave.

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