

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 17 January 2025
1.00pm

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Paddington Trio

Tuulia Hero violin
Patrick Moriarty cello
Stephanie Tang piano

Lotta Wennäkoski (b.1970)

Päärme ('Hem')

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Piano Trio No. 2 in E flat D929 (1827)
*I. Allegro • II. Andante con moto •
III. Scherzo. Allegro moderato •
IV. Allegro moderato*



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Lotta Wennäkoski first came to public notice in her home country of Finland, especially after a concert focusing on her work was held at the Helsinki New Music Festival in 1999. Before then she had studied violin in Budapest, composition in Finland and the Netherlands, and started her composing career with music for films and radio plays. As the new millennium got underway, commissions began to come in from outside her native land, including a BBC commission for the Last Night of the 2017 Proms, titled *Flounce*.

One of the meanings of the word 'flounce' that fed into Wennäkoski's inspiration is that of the trimmings on a dress. *Päärme* means 'Hem' in Finnish, so there would seem to be an ongoing interest. The composer confirms this, saying of her piano trio *Päärme* ('Hem'): 'We often speak in music of crafting in a figurative sense, and craftsmanship is, for the composer particularly, a traditional professional virtue. I personally have from time to time nevertheless been interested in the concrete images aroused by handicrafts, the way fabrics feel, and sewing.'

'The piano trio *Päärme* (Hem) has a pulsative character, especially in the outer sections, and the idea of steady but erratically colourful stitching prompted the amusing and highly unusual word I chose for the title of the piece. The hemming in this trio is cheerfully brisk, though the result is not always even intended to be over-neat or regular. For noise sounds are also an intrinsic feature of a hand-made texture.'

The first performance was given by the Sibelius Trio in 2015. The special interpretive qualities of this ensemble prompted Wennäkoski to write the slow melodic music of the middle section, knowing, she says, 'just how succulent such delicate, intensive lines can sound in the hands of ace players'.

In 1827, the Swedish singer Isak Albert Berg (1803–86) visited Vienna. Reports differ as to whether he was a tenor or baritone; however, we know he was conductor of the Stockholm Philharmonic Choir and a revered teacher whose pupils included the 'Swedish Nightingale', Jenny Lind. He struck up an immediate rapport with **Schubert**, who asked for a copy of the Swedish folksongs he had heard Berg perform.

One of them – 'Se solen sjunker' ('The sun has set') became absorbed into the fabric of Schubert's E Flat Piano Trio. Whether the text was as significant to him as the music is a matter of speculation. Even when using his own songs in instrumental works, Schubert did not always preserve their emotional import. But a distinctive falling octave, heard in the song on the word 'farväl' ('farewell'), keeps recurring in the Trio's slow movement.

Schubert did not quote the tune intact. Instead he fashioned his own variation on it from its melodic

elements and the trudging accompaniment. Nor did he confine its presence to the Andante; the tune comes back as an obsessive presence in the finale, and Schubert appears to have added an allusion to it in the opening Allegro after that movement had been completed.

Much of the first movement is tenebrous and tentative. Even the emphasis and re-emphasis of the declamatory opening evokes doubt rather than belief. In building the movement Schubert concentrates less on this figure than on the lyrical second subject and a recurring idea of repeated notes. (The latter extends its influence into the trio of the scherzo and the second subject of the finale.)

The Andante begins with cello and then piano intoning the bleak Swedish theme. The violin introduces an attempt at consolation; but that second theme, too, becomes hooked on the 'farewell' motif. There is also a stormier central episode, heard just once, that has something in common with the pained outbursts within the slow movements of Schubert's late piano sonatas. The canonic scherzo that follows is rather plaintive, but has a stamping-dance trio. Schubert asked that the movement be taken at minuet tempo.

The Finale begins with a pleasant, skipping theme, but again a neurotic note is stuck by the repeated drumming at the cadences. From this nervous figure a new, skittish theme begins, the thrumming suggesting a dulcimer or cimbalom. It lingers unnaturally, as if it is leading nowhere – or is afraid of where it might lead. The reason becomes apparent when the 'Farewell' song emerges from the shadows and dominates the music as none of the other themes has managed to do. On its final appearance it turns unexpectedly to the major; perhaps this is the only way music of such unsettled elusiveness could be brought to a convincing conclusion.

After hearing the Trio performed, Schubert made extensive cuts to the finale, insisting to his publisher that they must be observed. Although the excisions deny us some remarkable music, without them the movement places considerable demand on an audience in a work that is already expansive. The Paddington Trio play the shorter version, in accordance with Schubert's final thoughts. The composer straddled the end of one era of music and the beginning of another. While his Classical mind might have persuaded him to restore proportion and order by making the cuts, his Romantic soul had already written music that profoundly disturbed the quest for perfect balance.

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