

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 1 November 2025
3.00pm

This concert is supported by The Marchus Trust

Thomas Larcher Composer in Residence Focus Day

Benjamin Baker violin
Maciej Kułakowski cello
Benjamin Frith piano
Matthew Hunt clarinet
Ilker Arcayürek tenor

Thomas Larcher (b.1963)

Kraken for piano trio (1994-7)

I. Schnell • II. Langsam • III. Bewegt • IV. Fließend • V. Schnell

Nucleus for clarinet, cello and piano (2021, arr. 2023)

Lyrical Lights for tenor and clarinet (2013)

A Padmore Cycle for tenor and piano trio (2010-1, rev. 2017)

I. Ich schreibe heute durch • II. Almauftrieb •

III. Hart am Herz • IV. Familie Numero drei •

V. Hunger nach Heimat, die keine mehr ist •

*VI. Los los • VII. Ferdl • VIII. Und beim Weggehen schmilzt aus den
Augen der Schnee • IX. Lange zögern die Steine •*

X. Dein Wort mein Blindenhund • XI. Der Körper des Vogels am Weg



Composer in Residence is supported by Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne

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Kraken for piano trio

Kraken is a reflection of my own compositional history. Different developmental stages are laid free, superimposed, and combined; layers are shifted, called into question, and destroyed.

In counterpoint to this, a net of other layers is spanned across the piece (rhythmical layers, layers of character, and tone color).

Instrumentation for a trio provides almost ideal conditions. The possibilities for combining the individual instruments are systematically exploited. Through the partial preparation of the piano, a fourth instrument, so to speak, is added.

© Thomas Larcher, from program *Jeunesse 1998/99* 19 & 21 April 1999

Nucleus for clarinet, cello and piano

Thomas Larcher's music is often filled with bewitching sounds and colours, generated by distinctive physical techniques and objects, most notably on the long wound strings of the piano. It is however, equally characterised by the quality of *lyricism* – unpretentious, sometimes simple lines and melodies, winding around the music and the ears of the listener.

We hear this clearly in *Nucleus*, a short 2021 trio originally for low strings – viola, cello, double bass. In today's line up, the clarinet snakes around similar melodic shapes, with hints of a distant waltz. At first, cello pizzicato and a low piano centre us in C minor. The same rocking, waving shapes lead us to-ing and fro-ing into A minor – 'waves are always the basic element of music', Larcher has written.

At first, it's largely unhurried, unruffled music, but hints of darkness gradually build up to an intense climax. In the piano there is an *extremely* low A, rumbling over those winding, snaking shapes.

It is only in the final bars that we hear these three instruments all in their darkest register – an enigmatic coda of rich and chocolaty chords punctuated by silence.

Lyrical Lights for tenor and clarinet

Lyrical Lights was written for a 2013 art exhibition by Rens Veltman, and used a new text for the exhibition by Jeff Friedman and Roy Nathanson. The tenor part was originally taken by Larcher's regular and trusted collaborator Mark Padmore – 'A companion willing to accompany me into remote musical territory', most notably as the eponymous dedicatee of Larcher's *A Padmore Cycle*.

'For a composer,' Larcher has written, 'literature, a text, is like a magnet: a magnet creates magical patterns out of random iron filings'.

The text places us at the Southernmost tip of Brooklyn, New York – there is mention of Coney Island, Brighton Beach, a boardwalk and a mother's apartment. Aside from these specifics, however, the tone of the text is elusive, exploratory. Two protagonists – Irving and Violet – share hazy, poetic and evocative memories, often connected to the ocean. The 'sea of molecules', the 'wave pulsating through air'.

In some passages of Larcher's setting, such as the opening, the clarinet part provides a backdrop, a static support for the singer. More often, however, it is the clarinetist that is the far more volatile and virtuosic member of the duo – swooping glissandi, piercing shrieks, fast passagework.

In the piece's second half, the tenor's first mention of 'Violet' launches a cascading patterning in the clarinet, obsessively stuck on single shapes. First fast, but slowing and becoming lyrical for the 'dark times' intoned by the tenor. From a sustained high B, the clarinet begins to slowly melt, a quarter-tone at a time, downwards and downwards until its lowest possible note to end the piece: 'This is that shaded room'.

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A Padmore Cycle for tenor and piano trio

In *A Padmore Cycle* – originally for tenor and piano and first performed in 2011 – I used texts by two writers and friends, Hans Aschenwald and Alois Hotschnig. These are short poems about the natural environment, the mountains and the landscape of my native region, which is very important to me – they were an ideal textual foundation for me in composing this very open, tonal, fragile and transparent music, which always follows the texts' verbal melody, rhythm and tonality. There is no experimentation with words or syllables. These texts, almost all truncated and enigmatic, need very little time and space, whereas the accompaniment reflects retrospectively for a long time on the words that have been sung. In Mark Padmore, I found a companion willing to join me in entering remote musical territory, someone with the courage and openness to hold back his voice at many stages so that it would sound brittle and fragile as well as very exposed, yet all the while his voice remained extremely precise and present. Only that enabled me to draw a musical arc through the disparate texts.

Tonight's version for tenor and piano trio continues a fragile and often neglected tradition of chamber music with voice. From Haydn through to Beethoven, settings for voice and piano trio were popular. Exploring the possibilities of this 'smallest of orchestras' which the piano trio actually is, together with a voice, opens up a much more detailed soundworld that also reflects back on the detail of the texts.

© Thomas Larcher

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(2021, arr. 2023)

Lyrical Lights for tenor and clarinet (2013)

Roy Nathanson and Jeff Friedman

We've been here before, Irving.
That turn there. Remember.
The boardwalk turning towards Brighton Beach –
Between these four endless walls, a flaring light,
A flaming shadow, a sea of molecules,

A wave pulsating through air,
Through darkness, the motors revving,
The drumbeat vibrating behind the scrim
Where Brooklyn lives.

How we leaned into it: leaned
Into it, the Coney Island crook of an arm
A block from your mother's apartment.
This spot. Between the blue ocean of history
And the ocean blue parkway of family,
This spot – the smudge on the wood.

Leaned into it, Violet,
The way some men and women
In dark times spread their illumination
To shelter those without light,
And other men and women
In dark times lose their light.
And this is where we are, Irving,
In that shadow between.
Irving, this is that shaded room.

A Padmore Cycle for tenor and piano trio

(2010-1, rev. 2017)

I-VIII by Hans Aschenwald, IX-XI by Alois Hotschnig

Due to copyright reasons we are unable to reproduce the text of this cycle online.

I. Ich schreibe heute durch	I will write the day through
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II. Almauftrieb	Transhumance
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III. Hart am Herz	Hart at heart
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IV. Familie Numero drei	Family Numero Three
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V. Hunger nach Heimat, die keine mehr ist	Hunger for a homeland
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VI. Los los	Come, come on
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VII. Ferdl	Freddy
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VIII. Und beim Weggehen schmilzt aus den Augen der Schnee	And as they leave, the snow melts from their eyes
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IX. Lange zögern die Steine	The stones hesitate for a long time
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X. Dein Wort mein Blindenhund	Your word is my guide dog
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XI. Der Körper des Vogels am Weg	The bird's body on the path
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*Ich Schreibe and Los Los by Hans Aschenwald from Einleibung.
Gedichte. Haymon Verlag © 2010. Reproduced by permission. All rights
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