

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 22 March 2023  
1.00pm

## Fidelio Trio

Darragh Morgan violin  
Timothy Gill cello  
Mary Dullea piano

Joan Trimble (1915-2000)

Phantasy Trio (1940)

Frank Martin (1890-1974)

Piano Trio on popular Irish melodies (1925)  
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Gigue*

Ernest John Moeran (1894-1950)

Piano Trio in D (1920 rev. 1925)  
*I. Allegro • II. Lento molto - Andante •  
III. Allegro vivace • IV. Allegro*



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The piano trio has a long and distinguished history, and the repertoire, particularly that dating from the 18th and 19th centuries, is immense. That most prolific of composers, Joseph Haydn, composed at least 45 piano trios; Mozart and Beethoven more than half a dozen each; and the 19th-century Romantics such as Schumann, Brahms and Dvořák added substantially to the catalogue of works. Conversely, the three pieces being performed today are all from the 20th Century, and each represents its composer's sole contribution to the genre. However, it is the linking themes of Ireland and Irishness that are dominant across this afternoon's programme: one trio is by an Irish composer, another is by a composer who wished to be Irish, and the other is by a Swiss composer with music based on Irish melodies.

**Joan Trimble** was born in Enniskillen in County Fermanagh and studied both at Trinity College, Dublin and the Royal Irish Academy of Music, before moving to the Royal College of Music, where her teachers were Herbert Howells and Ralph Vaughan Williams (for composition) and Arthur Benjamin (for piano). While she was best-known professionally as part of a piano duo with her sister Valerie, she found time, amongst teaching and family responsibilities, to compose a relatively small corpus of stylistically individual works that make attractive and rewarding listening. The *Phantasy Trio* is firmly in the tradition of works of the genre invented in the early 1900s by Walter Willson Cobbett. It embodies particularly the harmonic richness that the character of English folksong can generate in music it inspires.

While Frank Martin and Ernest John Moeran were contemporaries, they shared other characteristics that informed their respective compositional styles; for example, they both began compositional experiments at a very early age and were largely self-taught on the piano. However, it is the adoption of an alternative national identity in later life that is most striking. In Swiss composer Martin's case, it was the country of his wife, the Netherlands, that was to be his home for the final decades of his life, while Moeran self-identified as Irish in later years, inspired principally by his paternal ancestry.

**Martin's *Piano Trio on popular Irish melodies*** was the result of a commission from an American amateur musician of Irish extraction, probably for a characteristically Irish work for him to play with his friends. While Martin had an interest in folk music, there is no evidence to suggest that he visited Ireland or that he had experienced traditional Irish music in any form, and he undertook his research in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, where he found an extensive collection of Irish folksongs and dances. Employing at least ten tunes from the collection, Martin constructed a three-movement work of great rhythmic complexity and melodic ingenuity, which since its composition in 1925 has become deservedly popular amongst chamber music ensembles. Since

the commission was withdrawn before the trio was finished, it may be supposed that the musician did not find it sufficiently 'Irish'. However, Martin completed it anyway, noting that he had enjoyed composing it, and without the commission he would never have thought of composing such a work. To contemporary ears one hundred years later, the trio undoubtedly exhibits familiar Irish aural tropes, such as the suggestion of pipe or fiddle and drone in the first and third movements.

**EJ Moeran's 'Irishness'** was a curious phenomenon, stemming partly from his father's ancestry, and partly from a love of the country that had started with his first visit as a soldier towards the end of the First World War. This would become so strong during the final decade of his life that he would assert an inability to compose adequately if he were not physically present in Ireland. However, during the early 1920s, he was estranged from the country under circumstances involving an unfortunate association with post-war Irish nationalism, and his attention was centred on English folk music

The Piano Trio in D has had an association with Wigmore Hall for more than a century, with its first performance having been given there by the Harmonic Trio in November 1921. On that occasion, it was reviewed somewhat unfavourably, being criticised particularly for recalling too much the familiar style of John Ireland. Subsequently, it was revised, and performed again at the Hall in June 1925, having been – according to the composer – 'entirely re-cast both as to form and material', and it is this version that is performed here today. The music throughout is in an English folksong idiom, with the themes of the opening and second movements being especially notable. How much of the 1921 version remains in the work is impossible to determine, since Moeran destroyed his earlier manuscript, but the style of the first movement bears a strong resemblance to that of his Violin Sonata in E minor, which is contemporary with the earlier manifestation of the trio. Critical reception of the later version was mixed, with the reviewer from *The Times* suggesting that the 'final two allegros were ... the best of it'. However, the critic of *The Musical Times* perhaps expressed it most succinctly, suggesting that Moeran should 'look more closely into the difficult problems of length and construction to discover how much the effect can be heightened by what is left unsaid'. The trio is indeed a long work, and it may be that it would have benefitted from some pruning of the extended development sections in the first and fourth movements and the somewhat rambling slow second movement. However, given that music by Moeran is so rarely performed, it may be considered that any opportunity – even a rambling slow movement – to hear this sadly neglected composer should be embraced.

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