

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 9 January 2023
1.00pm

Mithras Trio

Ionel Manciu violin
Leo Popplewell cello
Dominic Degavino piano

Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

Phantasie Piano Trio in C minor (1907)

*Allegro moderato ma con fuoco -
Andante con molta espressione -
Allegro scherzoso - Andante -
Allegro moderato - Con anima*

Joy Lisney (b.1993)

Petrichor (2022) world première

*I. Introduzione. Lento moderato
II. Scherzo. Allegretto
III. Con moto. Grazioso*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Trio in D Op. 70 No. 1 'Ghost' (1808)

*I. Allegro vivace e con brio
II. Largo assai ed espressivo
III. Presto*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

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Walter Willson Cobbett was a prosperous businessman who founded and chaired the Scandinavia Belting company. Today, however, he is more readily remembered as a musical philanthropist from the beginning of the 20th Century. As well as writing *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* and playing the violin to an impressive level, he supported many young players and composers, not least through the establishment of a prize for a 'phantasy' string quartet in 1905.

To Cobbett's mind, these 'phantasies' were the modern equivalent of Elizabethan viol fantasies, comprising several sections featuring rhythmically focussed variations on a theme. Having won second prize in the competition in 1905 for his Phantasy String Quartet, **Frank Bridge** then triumphed in 1907 with his (First) Piano Trio, before Cobbett commissioned an accompanying Piano Quartet, also named 'Phantasie', in 1910.

The Trio, like its companions, is a cyclical work, no doubt written under the influence of Debussy's String Quartet, which was something of a touchstone for the young Bridge. But rather than the four traditional movements of that masterpiece of French chamber music, Bridge's Trio obeys Cobbett's expectations to the letter, with a through-composed, arch-like form. After a stormy introduction, there is a highly lyrical sonata-form exposition, featuring brooding exchanges between the violin at the depth of its range and an equally soulful cello. The dialogue then intensifies as the piano seizes centre stage with a series of yet more fiery interjections.

The *Andante* follows on immediately and introduces a lighter though no less expressive style, with a hint of the salon, before driving piano chords and an enriched harmonic palette deny the domesticity. Only with the scherzo is the load lightened, as reflected in pizzicato textures and the rise and fall of the piano. Again, however, appearances can be deceiving and, after a brief reprise of the *Andante*, the *Allegro moderato* plunges us back into C minor for the recapitulation-cum-finale.

As with the symphony and the string quartet, **Beethoven** inherited the genre of the piano trio from Haydn. In 1795, not long after completing his tutelage with the great man, the young composer published his tripartite Op. 1. It marked the beginning of a project that would end in 1811 with the 'Archduke' Trio Op. 97. Yet the equality of agency witnessed between the three players in that final masterpiece is already apparent in the two works Beethoven composed during his 1808 stay with Countess Marie von Erdödy – and which he dedicated to his hostess. We hear the first of that Op. 70 pair.

For many years, it has been known as the 'Ghost' Trio, due to the atmosphere of its middle movement. And yet the whole piece begins with a hint of what is to come. The opening *Allegro vivace e con brio* may start boldly enough, but the cello soon sounds a surprising F natural. Brief, it nonetheless speaks of a volatility that will characterise what follows, despite pleading assurances from the piano and the other instruments in turn. As such, the first movement feels more like a battle of wills, with

the disruptive force of that initial intruder playing out in various ways, including triggering surprising tonal forays during the recapitulation – at times, sounding almost out of body – before it delivers belated confirmation of the tonic.

The eerie atmosphere and speed of the second movement, *Largo assai ed espressivo*, is accentuated, of course, by dint of its juxtaposition with the *Allegro*. Here, Beethoven may well have been exorcising thoughts of another project, a proposed opera based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which he hoped to write with Heinrich Joseph von Collin, whose younger brother Matthäus was responsible for the poem *Nacht und Träume* that later inspired Schubert. Ethereal, as well as frequently detached from itself, Beethoven's slow movement can feel extraordinarily unnerving. While the finale seems to have shrugged off the 'wayward sisters' of Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy, traces of the *Largo's* themes and rhythmic tattoos run through the halts and scurries of the *Presto*. And, if, as Shakespeare claims, 'fair is foul, and foul is fair', there must also remain something of its 'fog and filthy air', despite all the gaiety of the last movement.

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Petrichor is the word given to the earthy scent produced when rain falls on dry soil. It is constructed from the Ancient Greek words πέτρα (pétra) - 'rock' - and ἰχώρ (ikhór) - 'ichor', the ethereal liquid that flows in the veins of the immortals in Greek mythology.

Humans are extremely sensitive to this scent, and able to detect it even when diluted into the 'parts per billion' range. Since in general humans have a weaker sense of smell than other mammals, this exception has fascinated scientists for decades.

The music does not attempt to directly depict an aroma, nor does it imitate the intonation and rhythms of water (though the opening of the third movement might remind listeners of the first tentative drops of rain). Instead, this music is concerned with the primal connection we have to water and its life-giving qualities.

The first two movements are short and played without a break. In both cases the three instruments are often combined into one sound, rather than functioning as independent entities. You might notice the piano getting 'out of sync' with the strings towards the end of the movement as the music breaks down. This development continues in the final movement, which is as long as the first two combined. After the opening bars the two string players become increasingly independent from the piano, whose lyrical descants are the focus of this movement. There are often semiquavers running underneath, and in the coda these semiquavers seem to bubble over and the three instruments come together again for a final flourish.

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