

Feb 27 Astatine Trio with Sally Beamish (viola) & Peter Thomson (narrator)

## Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) Piano Trio in E, Hob. XV:28 (1797)

## *Allegro moderato*

## Allegretto

## *Finale. Allegro*

It is easy to undervalue Haydn's Piano Trios. The string parts often double the keyboard and generally lack the independence found later, say in Beethoven. But for much of his piano trio output, Haydn's hands were tied by the underpowered keyboards that he was writing for – doubling of the weak keyboard bass line was a necessity. Viewed on their own terms as 'keyboard sonatas with string accompaniment', we can enjoy their virtues rather than wishing they were Beethoven.

Charles Rosen devotes a whole chapter of *"The Classical Style"* to Haydn's piano trios encouraging us to see them as a "third great series of works to set beside the symphonies and the quartets". They fall into two main groups: 16 or so early trios composed between about 1760 and the early 1770s, and the latter 27 or so composed between 1784 and 1797. In all of them Haydn is surprising and inventive. In the earlier trios his natural extraversion sits well with the excesses of the contemporary Mannerist style – as in say C.P.E.Bach. But in Haydn's later trios his creative exuberance acquires new significance as it is constrained by the structures of the newly emerging Classical style.

The E major trio, is one of three dedicated to the virtuoso pianist Theresa Jansen Bartolozzi whom he had met in London. It is one of the last trios he wrote (around the same time as the Op 76 string quartets), and exploits the more powerful Broadwood pianos that were then available in England. It is a work of extraordinary inventiveness and surprise. Why did Haydn write no more piano trios after this set? Partly because he left London with its talented pianists and forceful Broadwoods, but also perhaps it is no coincidence that Beethoven's revolutionary three Op 1 piano trios had appeared two years earlier in 1795. Haydn knew when he had been overtaken.

The start of the E major trio is a surprise: *pizzicato* in the strings with *staccato* piano bass gives us piano trio as harp accompanying the piano's *cantabile* right hand melody. After the repeated first half Haydn has some modulatory fun. Starting from the home key of E (4-sharps) he moves to a climax in the unwritable 8 sharps of G-sharp, so enharmonically slips the key-signature into the 4 flats of A-flat for a few bars, kindly spelling out to the string players that their held Ab/G# across the key-change is in fact "the same note".

The opening of the E-minor second movement is no less surprising: again the piano has the melody but this time

Allegretto

Music score for 'Allegretto' section, featuring a bass clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a time signature of 3/4. The score consists of two staves of music, with the first staff continuing from the previous section.

introduced by a creeping Bach-like bass line played in octaves by all three players (*illustrated*). If you heard this passacaglia-like movement in isolation would you think it was by Haydn? Charles Rosen describes this extraordinary movement as being baroque, classical *and* romantic.

The last movement tries to unseat you with its quirky rhythms and gives us more modulatory bravura when, in the central E-minor section, Haydn plays a Beethoven-style trick and, after a pause, just drops a semitone to get into E-flat minor for just 4 bars. It

should be in 6 flats, but he writes it in 4 flats (again). Weird. One suspects a private joke with Mrs Bartolozzi.

### **Robert Schumann (1810-1856) Piano Quartet in E♭ Op 47 (1842)**

*Sostenuto assai — Allegro ma non troppo*

*Scherzo. Molto vivace*

*Andante cantabile*

*Finale. Vivace*

Coming after his 'Liederjahre' of 1840 and the subsequent 'Symphonic Year' of 1841, 1842 was Schumann's 'Chamber Music Year': three string quartets, the particularly successful piano quintet and tonight's piano quartet. Such creativity may have been initiated by Schumann at last winning, in July 1840, the protracted legal case in which his ex-teacher Friedrich Wieck, attempted to forbid him from marrying Wieck's daughter, the piano virtuoso Clara. They were married on 12 September 1840, the day before Clara's 21st birthday.

1842 did not start well though for the Schumanns. Robert accompanied Clara at the start of her concert tour of North Germany, but he tired of being in her shadow, returned home to Leipzig in a state of deep melancholy, and comforted himself with beer, champagne and, unable to compose, contrapuntal exercises. Clara's father spread an unfounded and malicious rumour that the Schumanns had separated.

However, in April Clara returned and Robert started a two-month study of the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. During June he wrote the first two of his own three quartets, the third following in July. He dedicated them to his Leipzig friend and colleague Felix Mendelssohn. The three quartets were first performed on September 13, for Clara's birthday. She thought them 'new and, at the same time, lucid, finely worked and always in quartet idiom' - a comment reflecting Schumann the critic's own view that the 'proper' quartet style should avoid 'symphonic furore' and aim rather for a conversational tone in which 'everyone has something to say'.

After an August visit to Bohemia (where the Schumanns called on Metternich), the Piano Quintet followed in mid-October, and tonight's Piano Quartet in November. Both pieces, according to *Grove*, show a tension between symphonic and traditionally chamber writing as 'chamber music came to occupy an intermediary position between private entertainment and public display'. Although the Quintet is played more often than the Quartet, the latter is in many ways the better piece.

Admirer of Beethoven that he was, Schumann works his way towards the main theme of the first movement. The brief opening *sostenuto* introduces and explores its first four notes. Then, in the *Allegro*, the strings shorten these notes and speed them up drawing

an approving comment in running quavers from the piano. Finally, the cello discovers what they have all been looking for and gives



us the exuberant theme (*illustrated*). Helped by the running quavers, the exuberance continues throughout the movement, albeit interrupted twice by the return of the *sostenuto* passage.

The *Scherzo* alternates with two contrasting *Trios*. The theme of the lightly scampering, Mendelssohn-like *Scherzo* is related to the running quavers of the first movement. The first *Trio* is based on a gently descending scale, while the second *Trio* slows the action even more with bar-long syncopated chords interrupted by scampering.

The cello again gets to introduce the theme in the *Andante*, but in a characteristically Schumann way, as if you had just opened the door into a room where the movement had already started. The cello gets 16 glorious bars to itself before the violin takes over and the cello answers canonically after a 2-bar delay. There is a subdued interlude in the remote key of G  $\flat$  followed by the viola finally getting to play the theme, accompanied by genially playful passage on the violin. During this the cello is silent to allow the C-string to be tuned down a tone to B  $\flat$  to enable the movement to end with a long, low, *pianissimo* B  $\flat$  octave. Above this drone, like the *Sostenuto* opening of the first movement, the end of the *Andante* anticipates in slow motion the three chords that start the last movement.

After an opening flourish of these three chords rounded off by descending semiquavers, the viola expands these semiquavers into a fugal theme. These busy scales are contrasted with, on the one hand, a creeping, semitone-spaced rising and falling chromatic scale and on the other with a wonderfully skippy canonic variant of the movement's opening chords which leaps within and between the strings (*illustrated*).

The whole movement is packed with ideas and energy and it gallops to a heroic end with a final version of those three opening chords.



### Sally Beamish (1956-) *The Seafarer* for Voice & Piano Trio (2000), with monotypes by Jila Peacock

Translator of the text, Charles Harrison Wallace, writes:

"After Beowulf, *The Seafarer* is perhaps the most famous of all Anglo-Saxon poems. It belongs to a group of lyric and elegiac poems, all quite brief, all extraordinarily powerful and direct. They are found in one manuscript, the Exeter Book, dating from the early tenth century, in Exeter Cathedral Library. Their mood is one of stoic resignation in the face of loss, lit fitfully by shafts of sunlit hope, sometimes Christian, sometimes less specifically linked to religion. They take us into a world where nature is an overwhelming force, attractive yet devastating: The seafarer speaks of the pull of the sea, the lonely yet fulfilling way of life which 'that fine fellow, carefree in his cups set snugly up in town, cannot conceive', but portrays also the bitterness of the seafarer's existence, the hail which represents both physical and spiritual desolation. But those who live on land are in no better shape. 'The days of glory have decayed/ the earth has spilled its splendour'; and the seafarer is on a journey which is not only liturgical but metaphysical. The final image of the

poem is of him steering ‘a steadfast course...to the living well-head and heaven haven of our Lord’s love’. At the close, as the poet gives thanks to God, he sets against the images of transience on earth the Christian liturgy with its images of eternity.”

The translated text is available here:

<https://drc.usask.ca/projects/seafarer/original/wallacetrans.htm>

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Composer of the music, Sally Beamish, writes:

“This is the central work in a group of three Seafarer pieces; the first is for solo violin, and the third is a viola concerto. They are all directly inspired by the translation from the Anglo-Saxon by Charles Harrison Wallace, and follows closely his view of the text, falling into five sections. Various themes reappear throughout, transforming as the music develops. The opening undulating wave motif, shortly followed by spiky hail-like counterpoint and the calls of birds (osprey and tern) are merged in various combinations. A ‘hammering heart’ theme emerges. The opening of Part III, with a sinister version of a cuckoo call, marks the beginning of a transformation which culminates at the centre of the piece with eerie otherworldly string music where birds are transformed into banshee-like spirits, hovering as if suspended. Part IV begins with solo cello; the falling third of the cuckoo becomes a mellow elegy. From this point, bleakness almost imperceptibly becomes optimism – a trembling hesitant piano section resolves in a clamour of bells, and thereafter the music anchors itself into a prayer-like ‘coming home’.

“All three Seafarer works were inspired by the set of monoprints made by Jila Peacock, which are intended to be projected as an integral part of the performance of this work.

The Seafarer was commissioned for the Australian festival “*Summer on the Peninsula*” to accompany Peacock’s ‘Seafarer’ monotypes. The commission was supported by Boydell & Brewer Ltd, and first performed at Alderton Church, Suffolk on September 16th 2000 by Crawford Logan, voice, Jacqueline Shave, violin, Robert Irvine, cello and Sally Beamish, piano, in a special presentation directed by David Thompson.”

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Creator of the images, Jila Peacock writes:

“I first read the Anglo-Saxon poem The Seafarer in 1999 when I was asked to advise on illustrations for a publication of a new translation by Charles Harrison Wallace. I became fascinated by the poem and found its concept of life as a voyage, and its concern with the material and the metaphysical world echoed many ideas in contemporaneous Persian and Arabic mystical literature. I made a series of images in response to the poem which I showed to Sally Beamish. In 2000, Jack and Sue Phipps of the Summer on the Peninsula Music Festival commissioned The Seafarer trio, a multimedia piece with voice and projected images. The images were published by Sylph Editions in 2010 and are now in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge. My original images have now been edited into a film by Eileen Haring Woods, and are projected on a single screen behind the performers.”