

GRAND
PIANO

FIORINI

IN THE MIDST OF THINGS

PIANO AND CHAMBER MUSIC

CHARLENE FARRUGIA, *piano*
DIMITRI ASHKENAZY, *clarinet*
REBECCA RAIMONDI, *violin*
STEFAN KROPFITSCH, *cello*

KARL FIORINI (b. 1979)

IN THE MIDST OF THINGS

CHARLENE FARRUGIA, *piano*
DIMITRI ASHKENAZY, *clarinet* (1, 6–9)
REBECCA RAIMONDI, *violin* (1, 4, 6–9)
STEFAN KROPFITSCH, *cello* (4, 6–9)

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Recorded in the presence of the composer

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1	TRIO LAMINA for clarinet, violin and piano (2002)	10:04
	Lento-libero – ♩ = 126 – Quasi improvvisazione – Cadenza – Lento – Allegro con fuoco	
	TWO PIANO ÉTUDES	09:56
2	Les Âmes effleurées (2007)	05:17
3	Reflets flous (2008)	04:32
4	PIANO TRIO for violin, cello and piano (2005)	12:18
	Grave – Allegro – Lento-libero – Quasi Cadenza – Come improvvisazione – Lento molto – Allegro molto energico assai	
	PIANO SONATA (2017)	10:45
5	♩ = 60 – Lento assai – Agitato	
	IN THE MIDST OF THINGS for clarinet, violin, cello and piano (2019)	16:21
6	I. Grave – Vivo	06:03
7	II. ♩ = 52 – Meno mosso –	03:41
8	III. Patetico, ma non troppo – Poco più mosso – Molto più lento	03:31
9	IV. Presto – Poco più mosso	03:06

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

TOTAL TIME: 59:53

KARL FIORINI (b. 1979) IN THE MIDST OF THINGS – CHAMBER AND PIANO MUSIC

A European without frontiers, Karl Fiorini studied in Malta with Charles Camilleri and Joseph Vella before moving to London, working with Diana Burrell at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama (2004–05). He completed his doctorate programme with Michael Zev Gordon at the Royal College of Music (2006–15). Establishing the Valletta International Spring Orchestra Festival in 2007, he settled in Paris the following year, immersing himself in Gallic culture, aesthetics and way of life.

‘Art must reflect the society of its time. A true artist captures the Spirit of their Age’, Fiorini said in 2003. Wrestling for change, questioning perceptions and values, rejecting complacency, going out on a limb, and getting grass to grow in rocky landscapes, is Fiorini’s grail. Beethoven’s piano sonatas and Chopin’s études are his daily catechism, referencing his thinking and conversation. He believes in roots. But ‘new winds blow’. ‘Far from being anchored in the past’, the Spanish-Lebanese poet Ana Bocanegra Briasco observes, he’s always ‘opening up channels, always looking for new ways in which, without surrendering to fashion, he feels free to do what he believes in and stay true to the music and to himself’.¹ ‘I compose what I feel is right and what comes from within.’

With the youthful *Trio Lamina* (2002), two violin concertos (June 2007 and December 2011 respectively) and the neo-post-Romantic *Second Symphony* premiered in Milan at Expo 2015, his music ‘detached’ itself from Mediterraneanised nascency, venturing into an arena, as he puts it, ‘marked by a sense of self-mockery and eclecticism, without lapsing into cliché’. Analysis and graphs objectify the bricks-and-mortar of his invention. But allegory, subtexts, the what-might-be/what-if factor, the imagery of words and brush-strokes, are needed to begin to suggest (inadequately) the impact, the psychological profiling, the maze of tensions, the frissons of feeling and glance coursing through what he is writing today. Teasingly we are invited into a Pandora’s box of paradoxes and contradictions. In this counterpoint of vignettes and life meetings, are intense states of being, volcanic storms and wild oceans, a man caressing and cursing sound and rhythm, who twists and tortures innocent motifs and strands of memory into climaxes and explosions of terrifying confrontation. The voice is visceral and sensuous, lean yet generous, a *nuît blanche* ride where the innermost goes hand-in-hand with raw savagery and snarling cynicism, troubled desires and high-wire risk-taking.

¹ Briasco, Ana Bocanegra, *Karl Fiorini Violin Concertos* (Métier/Divine Art, 2013).

Fiorini's output ranges from orchestral, opera and large-scale vocal settings to chamber music and solo pieces. Three European Capitals of Culture have commissioned or programmed his works: Marseille 2013, Mons 2015, and Valletta 2018. 'Music in itself', says Fiorini, 'cannot express anything, but it's a language everyone understands or can understand.' Relatively early he asserted that 'to create a method that informs the piece itself, not simply the context of its production' was one of his 'central compositional philosophies'. 'My musical language', he noted in 2013, 'cannot be labelled as either tonal or atonal, although strong tonal centres are prevalent [without returning to functional harmony] ... it has never been my intention to be an "experimental" or an "avant-garde" composer.' Not all the people he cites as inspirational – nonconformists, often challengers of authority – are household familiars: Alexander Krein, Samuil Feinberg, Mieczysław Weinberg, Vsevolod Zaderatsky, Valentin Silvestrov. Literature, like painting and languages, has been a consuming passion from the start.

Trio Lamina (2002) – *lamina* in the sense of foil, veneer, leaf, layer – was Fiorini's first attempt towards consolidating cogent new dimensions of structure and harmony, crafting a whole out of successive smaller sections. It co-won the 2004 Alea III International Composition Competition, University of Boston. Though cast in one movement, its six sub-sections display evident traits of Bartókian arch form, its penultimate *lento* – 'a nocturnal quasi-tenebrous scene' with slow moving Mussorgskian chords and octaves on the piano (*quasi* 'con mortuis in lingua mortua') preceded by a transitioning cadenza for clarinet offset by violin double-note *tremoli* and *glissandi* – hinting further at the Hungarian's 'night music' manner. The macrostructure follows a fast–slow–fast scheme, the 'finale' in the guise of a modified, temporally more dynamic reflection of incidents in the first part. Pondering, juxtaposing and mutating material, braiding mosaics of emotion, contribute to its persona.

Fiorini's two concert studies for piano – *Les Âmes effleurées* (2007) and *Reflets flous* (2008), dating from the end of his time in London – are French in sonority and ambience. In the case of the first, facets even are drawn from Chopin's *Second Ballade*. But not their means of organisation. These are in fact complex examples of Fibonacci sequencing where each integer is the sum of the two preceding ones – a 'nautilus shell' construct (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13 ...) reaching back to Pingala's Sanskrit *Chandaḥśāstra*. In 2013 the composer defined *Les Âmes effleurées* ('Souls Touched') as 'the Interval of the fifth, the Unfolding of Form': 'In this piece [measured in crotchets, and based on a varied hexachord and four-note sequence] I explore the expansion and contraction of the dyad

... The structural essence consists of multiple Fibonacci series, determining the beats and number of bars ... The composition is divided into five sections.' Fibonacci ordering generates inevitably 'a kind of symmetry and a unifying structure, a proscenium arch around the whole composition' through which the numeric sequences can 'perform'. 'Enlargement' and 'cascade' techniques play an audible role in phase lengthening.²

'Owing most to Debussy's harmonic palette, particularly his practice of retaining pitches between chords', *Reflets flous* ('Blurred Reflections') subdivides into eleven expressively rarefied sections, measured in semiquavers, 'the motion from one note to the next governed by an intervallic principle of either a major or minor third, and the inversion of these intervals to ones of a major or minor sixth'. 'Metaphorically speaking', Fiorini says, 'the addition of another part in the piano's lower register [34 seconds in] acts like a pebble, dropped in the calm water of a lake, thus blurring the clarity of the surface. As further pebbles are released, ripples abound, and the surface becomes hazier. As the threshold of distortion approaches, so the music takes on an independent character.'

The *Piano Trio* (2005) closes a chapter begun with *Lamina*. 'Compelled to search for a new compositional approach, this work showed me that it was possible to use primary numbers to create phrases. In addition, I also used hexachords to generate a modal grammar. Each of the seven distinct sections is monothematic, using the same mode in either its prime or retrograde versions, or through inversions to develop the material.' 'Influenced by the folk music of North Africa' – a return to hunting grounds sourced previously albeit differently by Camilleri, articulating Fiorini's belief that 'today we must think globally but act locally' – the unifying scale, binding the whole organically, is based on the notes B–C sharp–D–E flat–F sharp–G, applied horizontally or vertically with cross-sectioned transpositions and pitch-shifted segmentation stratifying the soundscape. Temporally and longitudinally the *Piano Trio* is broader than *Lamina*, by some two minutes and 89 bars, with its incidents ordered otherwise. There are still, nevertheless, shared horizons. The unaccompanied *grave* cello introduction; slow-moving, blue-iced piano chords; ejaculated energy; the violin *glissandi* of the first cadenza. The piano's dusky, scarcely sounded, near-static presence in the extended *lento* pages – semiquaver quintuplets, *con tristezza*, floated high above *angélus* bells and subterranean 'pebble' drops, their chiselled regularity expressively near-faceless – intriguingly metamorphoses the 'lingua mortua' paragraphs of three years previously. That this episode melts seamlessly into the Golden Section region of the inclusive design, paralleling *Lamina*, is a matter of unforced natural placement, a hushed case of architectural dramaturgy.

² Karl Fiorini, *The Fibonacci series as a means of organising musical material: a composer's tool or constraint?*, RCM DMus thesis, London December 2013.

By this stage of Fiorini's development, 'method' composition – the serialisation of pitch, rhythm, phrases and perpendiculars – was showing signs of impeding rather than liberating his creativity. 'I had begun to notice that I was no longer making musical decisions according to the pure pleasure of the inner ear, but, rather, by heartlessly abiding to purely intellectual procedures ... After a devoted engagement with the Fibonacci series, I came to understand that [the centrifugal force that] had once fuelled my music, indeed, providing much of the musical content, was now obstructing its growth ... What had merely been deterministic was now dogmatic. It was at this point that I needed to retreat and reflect on my own compositional processes, and even my own identity as a thinker in the Western tradition, caught (as we all are), between the lure of a single, over-arching, endlessly reassuring pattern, and the elusive sublime of irrational imagination ... As a way of re-presenting my music to myself, I felt I had to revisit tonality and assimilate it into my harmonic language, without returning to functional harmony. I decided to do this by basing my music on the equal temperament scale, where any chord [or cluster] can be analysed tonally.'³ Seminal scores from this period included the *Second Violin Concerto*, recorded in 2012, and *Cadavre Exquis* for voices and ensemble ('collaborating with previous versions of myself').

Cyclic and highly concentrated, the *Piano Sonata* (2017)⁴, Fiorini tells us, looks Eastwards. Not so much the Oriental East as Teutonic worlds East of Paris. Liszt's Weimar, Berg's Vienna, Bartók's Budapest, Feinberg's Moscow. Precipitously difficult, massively gestured, and of a colouring, textural layering and sonic density intrinsically orchestral, three joined chapters – fast, slow, fast, more demarcated than diffused – comprise the single movement continuum. Cross-referenced cells, contoured relationships, taut motivic development, rhythmic metabolism, repetition and reprise determine its profile. Occasionally we meet with paraphrastic nods in the direction of the Liszt *B minor Sonata*. Now and again lava fields loom where every hammer strike is like a cyclopean flame born of Loki fire (the super-charged left-hand cannonades 13 bars before the central *lento assai* for instance – V12 thrust). The 'fine pen' style of the ruminative central collonade focusses on stranding and catharsis. Overall, small seeds lead to bigger expanses. Inverted/transposed, the first four notes of the initial 'subject' (D–E flat–D–E) become the lengthened lead motif of the *Dies irae*-suggestive rejoinder. With the *lento assai* the shape is modified to intimate widening intervals (B flat–A–B–A flat), which then, inverted/transposed/quicken, kick off the finale. A gritty, virtuoso concert piece, rampant battle chargers racing the glory moments.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ A further sonata, 'No 2', was completed in May 2021.

In the Midst of Things (2019) captures a 'state of being'. 'Was Du in Dir nährst, das wächst' ('What you nourish within you grows'– Goethe). More spacious than its companions, it falls into four independent movements, the second and third linked pivotally. An unusual feature of the scherzo-like second is the rhythmically equalised 64-bar *pianissimo* epilogue for clarinet, violin and cello (without piano), proportionately two bars shy of the Golden Section juncture. Like *Lamina* and the *Piano Trio*, events bud pensively, with a violin monody. And, like the *Sonata*, they're pulverised home by a physically dynamic 'Fiorini boogie'. Again, related binding melodic figures are traceable throughout – drawing on intervallic contractions and expansions of the two primary cells at the start: D–E flat–D flat–B flat–C–D–B, G–B flat–C–A–C sharp–F sharp–C. Rhythmically florid linear debate is plentiful. But so, too, is the sense of an orbiting design energised, Beethoven-like, through the tensions, peaks and reposals of blocked/broken chordal progressions spiralling between anchored gravity points. Time-honoured values, 21st century plated.

Ateş Orga

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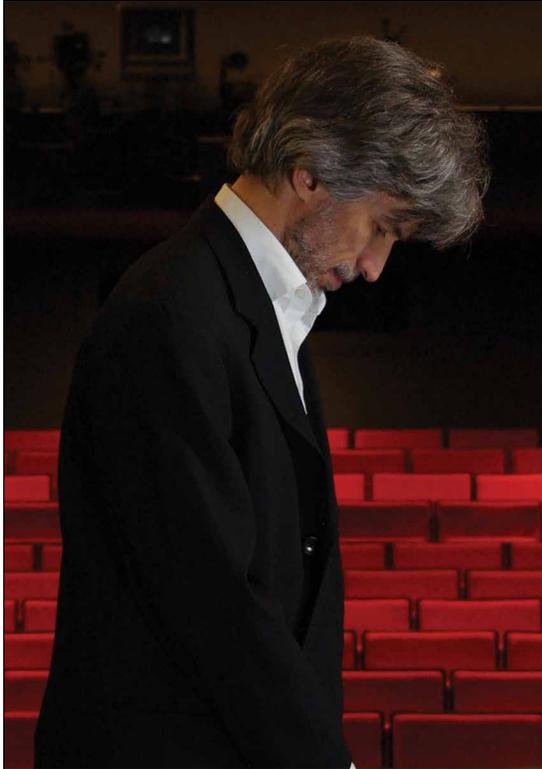
COMPOSER'S NOTE

It wasn't coincidence that made me combine these works. Nor is the album's title, *In the Midst of Things*, accidental. All these pieces were composed during transitional moments in my life – artistic and personal. The *Piano Trio* represents the end of a musical journey begun three years before with *Trio Lamina*. The two concert studies for piano, *Les Âmes effleurées* and *Reflets flous*, dating from my final years in London, hint in a *nuage*-like way at my early *coquetteries* with France, its language, literature, people. The *Piano Sonata* from around a decade later – following two violin concertos and my *Second Symphony* – shifts its attention elsewhere, unmistakably Eastwards. *In the Midst of Things*, the most recent chronologically, is more introspective, endeavouring to capture a 'state of being'.

Karl Fiorini

www.karlfiorini.com

DIMITRI ASHKENAZY



© Matthias Barton

Dimitri Ashkenazy, born in New York, began playing the piano at the age of six before switching to clarinet under the tuition of Giambattista Sisini, with whom he continued studying at the Lucerne Conservatory. His contemporary interests include such works as Peter Maxwell Davies' *Strathclyde Concerto No 4*, which he has performed with the composer conducting, and Krzysztof Penderecki's own transcription of his *Viola Concerto*, likewise with the composer. An active chamber musician, he has performed with the Aurn, Brodsky, Endellion, Heath, Ives and Kodály Quartets; and with partners such as Barbara Bonney, Helmut Deutsch, David Golub, Edita Gruberova, Ariane Haering, Antonio Meneses, Cristina Ortiz, Maria João Pires and Aleksandar Madzar, as well as his brother Vovka and his father Vladimir Ashkenazy. In addition to his concert activity, Dimitri Ashkenazy has made numerous CDs (Decca, DUX, Ondine, Paladino, Pan Classics, Sheva Collection, VDE Gallo), and is a frequent radio and television broadcaster. He gives invited masterclasses worldwide.

www.harrisonparrott.com/artists/dimitri-ashkenazy

REBECCA RAIMONDI



© Johannes Berger

The Italian violinist Rebecca Raimondi studied with Salvatore Accardo, Marco Fiorini, Georg Moench and Lorenzo Fabiani, graduating in 2014 under the guidance of Antonio De Secondi from the Conservatori Statale di Musica O. Respighi in Latina. She then worked with Jacqueline Ross, David Takeno and Pavlo Beznosiuk at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London. Currently she is studying Baroque violin at the Frankfurt Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende with Petra Müllejans. Her repertory ranges from Baroque and Classico-Romantic sonatas and concertos to a challenging cross-section of contemporary works. With Alessandro Viale she won the Scotese Prize for best ensemble (Ardorè Duo) at the Nuova Consonanza Festival in 2018. She has recorded admired albums for Sheva Contemporary (David Collins, Robin Holloway), Brilliant Classics (Riccardo Malipiero) and Stradivarius (Marco Quagliarini). Recipient of the Excellentissimus Prize, by appointment of the President of the Italian Republic, she plays a 1907 Riccardo Antoniazzi violin.

www.rebeccaraimondi.com

STEFAN KROPFITSCH



© Annamaria Kowalsky

The Austrian cellist Stefan Kropfisch has since 2006 been head of the Institute for Strings at the Vienna University of Music and Performing Arts. He studied with Tobias Kühne and Wolfgang Herzer, solo cellist of the Wiener Philharmoniker. Permanent guest of the Vienna Konzerthaus and a founder member of the Jess-Trio-Wien, he is in great demand as a solo and chamber player on both sides of the Atlantic, appearing regularly in all the major European festivals. A busy recording artist, he has collaborated with a number of distinguished modern day composers, including Schnittke. In 1987 he was the featured cellist in the James Bond film *The Living Daylights*, playing Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* and the Dvořák *Concerto*.

www.stefankropfisch.com

CHARLENE FARRUGIA

The Maltese pianist Charlene Farrugia studied with Dolores Amodio and then Diana Ketler at the Royal Academy of Music in London. For several years subsequently she was mentored by Boris Petrushansky. She gained her doctorate in performance under Kenneth Hamilton with a thesis on piano repertory for the left hand. In 2018 she received Malta's International Achievement Award. For her contribution to the music profession she was made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2020. An ambassador of EMMA for Peace, the Euro Mediterranean Music Academy, under the auspices of UNESCO, she is now professor of piano at the Music Academy, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia. For Naxos she has recorded Charles Camilleri's *First Piano Concerto* with the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra (8.573373). A solo album, *Khachaturian: Recitatives and Fugues; Children's Albums I and II* was released to critical acclaim on Grand Piano Records in March 2021 (GP 834).

www.charlenefarrugia.com





STEINWAY & SONS

KARL FIORINI
© Joe Smith

KARL FIORINI (b. 1979)

IN THE MIDST OF THINGS

Maltese composer Karl Fiorini is a European without frontiers – the compositions in this album reflect his early detachment from a Mediterranean identity towards a more varied and intense sound world. *Trio Lamina* features elements of Bartók's 'night music' in its complex sub-sections, whereas Fiorini's two piano studies, which predate his move to Paris, already exude a Gallic ambience. Influenced by North African folk music, the *Piano Trio* expands his global reach, and the *Piano Sonata*, a gritty virtuoso concert piece, shifts geographical influence towards Eastern Europe to powerful effect. All of these world première recordings were recorded in the presence of the composer.

1	TRIO LAMINA for clarinet, violin and piano (2002)	10:04
2–3	TWO PIANO ÉTUDES (2007–08)	09:56
4	PIANO TRIO for violin, cello and piano (2005)	12:18
5	PIANO SONATA (2017)	10:45
6–9	IN THE MIDST OF THINGS for clarinet, violin, cello and piano (2019)	16:21

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CHARLENE FARRUGIA



DIMITRI ASHKENAZY



REBECCA RAIMONDI



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