

ONDINE

PĒTERIS VASKS

Works for Piano Trio



Trio Palladio



PĒTERIS VASKS (b. 1946)

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|----|---|--------------|
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| 2 | I. Crescendo | 2:44 |
| 3 | II. Misterioso | 4:41 |
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| 5 | IV. Burlesca I: Allegro assai | 3:21 |
| 6 | V. Monologhi: Espressivo | 2:26 |
| 7 | VI. Burlesca II | 3:29 |
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TRIO PALLADIO

Eva Bindere, violin

Kristīna Blaumane, cello

Reinis Zariņš, piano

Globally, **Pēteris Vasks** is the most popular Latvian composer of contemporary classical music. He started out as an avant-garde protester speaking in a modernist musical language and grew into a painter of the eternal battle between the good and the evil in his large and small-scale vocal and instrumental works.

Vasks' ideas are compatible with those of Arvo Pärt, Giya Kancheli, Valentyn Sylvestrov and similar composers; he is likewise an idealist. He speaks of the fundamentals – the battle between light and darkness, the presence of a frightening monster, the reflection of nature in sound, the echoes of composer's beloved birds, the possibility of a catharsis, and the fate of our people and the humanity as a whole – with a seal in the past, chaos in the present, and a hope in the future.

Pēteris Vasks was born in the city of Aizpute in Courland in a pastor's family, and his childhood was closely tied to the Aizpute Baptist church and church choir songs. Vasks started an independent life in Riga in his early teen years by attending a music school, later moving on to double bass performance studies in the Vilnius conservatory, concurrently playing in several professional symphony orchestras in Lithuania and Latvia.

Vasks showed a composer's thread from an early age, but it took years to pluck up the courage to share in his music that which swelled in his heart. Vasks started studying composition in the mid-1970s and introduced himself as a composer to a wider audience when he was already over thirty.

Pēteris Vasks' body of work contains three symphonies, several small-form symphonic pieces, ten opuses for a string orchestra, instrumental concertos for the flute, oboe, English horn, violin (three concertos), viola, cello (two concertos), music for one and two pianists, several organ pieces, a number of chamber music pieces for strings and wind instruments, sacred and contemporary choral music *a cappella* and with instruments.

The main source of inspiration for Pēteris Vasks is, above all, Latvia's nature, the voices of birds, and starry skies. But the sacral vertical is always present in the composer's life and

music – his works are unimaginable without the relationship between light and darkness, without the interaction of doubt and manifestation.

Lonely Angel is the reinterpretation of the fifth movement *Meditation* from Pēteris Vasks' String Quartet No. 4 (1999, commissioned by the Kronos Quartet). In 2006, a version for violin and string instruments was created (premiered in the Riga Cathedral on 3 July, 2006 by Gidon Kremer and Kremerata Baltica). In 2019, Pēteris Vasks wrote its arrangement for violin, cello and piano, which at the time of the release of this album has not been performed onstage.

Speaking about versions of his pieces, Vasks says this: “There are compositions that focus entirely on the sonic potential of the chosen instruments; however, there is also music in which the message is the main component, and the use of different instruments colours the music differently. It is like a new viewpoint on the message. It cannot be said that new music comes to me in a constant stream, so I gladly revisit my ‘children’ again and again, creating a new version every once in a while. I don’t really want to leave them completely unattended out in the vast world.”

Pēteris Vasks: “Looking back at my life, I realize that my guardian angel has done significant amounts of guarding through some periods of my life. I look back and wonder how I survived through all of that. This guardian being cannot have any superhuman strength, no, or should I say super angel strength. He might also feel like it is just too much at times, so he pleads to his Superior – give me the strength to endure this. And we cannot really know if every man has their own guardian angel, or perhaps there is one angel for several people... Such is my childlike contemplation on them.”

Vasks places on the table a postcard reproduction of the Finnish painter Hugo Simberg's (1873–1917) painting *The Wounded Angel*. We look at it in silence for a while. Simberg's angel has a bandaged forehead and a bloody wing, she is being carried by two boys, one of whom is looking joylessly at the spectators of the painting. This is reminiscent of the Lithuanian composer and painter Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis' (1875–1911) signature

angel silhouettes. A wholly different kind of angel can be encountered in the works of the Scottish painter Peter Howson (b. 1958) who listens to Bach and Vasks while painting. In Howson's paintings, chrestomathic mythological, literary and religious motives clash with the modern day – the effect is striking.

Pēteris Vasks: “Materialism has depleted men, man thinks himself to be so powerful... In our unfathomable self-centeredness we forget that our guardian angels get tired too. But while the angels still have some strength left, they help keep the world in balance protecting us from falling off into the void, alongside which the modern life flows.”

Pēteris Vasks wrote the Piano Trio *Episodi e canto perpetuo* for violin, cello and piano in 1985 and dedicated it to Olivier Messiaen. Vasks used Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* as a sort of a template, yet did not put any obvious references to Messiaen's music in his own work. Admittedly, the last parts of the trio have similar harmonic elements, and, most importantly – one may draw certain parallels between the surrounding circumstances of Messiaen's quartet and Vasks' trio – the quartet was written in a concentration camp; the trio was born in the isolated prison that was the Soviet Union.

Pēteris Vasks: “My first encounter with Messiaen's music was in the 1960s when I was studying double bass performance in the Vilnius conservatorium. My mandatory piano lessons were led by a bright and interesting man – Eugenijus Ignatonis. He had found an arrangement of the vocalise from Messiaen's quartet for two pianists and in one lesson said – let's play this together! It was like a lightning flash to me – that music can be like this!”

Episodi e canto perpetuo has eight movements that are ordered in contrasts. “It is like the difficult road through evil, delusion and suffering to a song of love,” the composer says in its annotation.

The first episode *Crescendo* introduces us to the atmosphere of the composition. The second episode *Misterioso* is a view from above at the earth sleeping at night. The third episode *Unisoni* – “a masqued dance with the backdrop of a fantastic landscape”. Episode

four – *Burlesca* – is one of the few examples of irony, even grotesque in the works of Latvian composers. The fifth episode *Monologhi* is “an attempt at grasping, understanding what’s happening”. Episode six brings back the imagery of the fourth, but with an more intensity – “The black culmination of the opus. Road to nowhere?” Episode seven *Canto perpetuo* really is an emotionally saturated song of the violin and cello that leads the listener into the eighth movement *Apogeo e coda* – “the emotional peak of the composition” (notes from the composer’s annotation).

Episodi e canto perpetuo saw its premiere in the spring of 1986 in the hands of the newly-founded triumvirate: violinist Jānis Bulavs, cellist Mārtiņš Grīnbergs and pianist Aldis Liepiņš.

Pēteris Vasks: “All three musicians are full of enthusiasm and ideals. Before the concert in Riga on the 2nd of May, all four of us (and the cello) climbed into Mārtiņš Grīnbergs’ Zaporozhets (a very small Soviet car, a distant relative of the East German Trabant) and drove to the Salacgrīva music school where I worked at the time and where this trio was written the summer before. None of the few listeners understood much; I did try to explain some things, but oh well...”

Aldis Liepiņš: “The last rehearsals in Riga were happening at the same time as the Chernobyl catastrophe. We knew nothing of it at the time, of course. We played in Salacgrīva and Riga, after that toured what seemed like half of the Soviet Union with this trio of Vasks. We went north, Arkhangelsk, and to Kemerovo, Siberia, where there was some composers’ union plenary happening right then. The concerts were endlessly long, the audiences were exhausted, we played last and yet, after the trio, the crowd was jumping to their feet in ovation, we saw adoration wherever we went. This was a true time of triumph for Pēteris.”

The reviews in the Soviet press were also very favourable. The critics emphasize Vasks’ endless courage, the relentlessly quixotic sense of mission in enlightening the people; they do also note that in this conflict of light and dark, the light forces do not seem to linger in the consciousness of the listeners as strongly as the dark and grotesque ones. Perhaps there

is some connection to the catastrophe happening a mere thousand km from Riga shortly before the premiere.

When asked if during the mid-1980s when the National awakening movement had not really started yet, Pēteris Vasks had lived with the hope of once leaving the prison of the Soviet Union, the composer replies: “Yes, I guess I did believe that the regime would fall sometime soon. And I did have my own island of freedom back then – writing music; I could always find shelter in that.”

Pēteris Vasks wrote ***Plainscapes*** in 2002, with the premiere taking place on the 28th of March, 2002 in the Vienna Minoritenkirche. The honour of premiering the piece was given to the violinist Gidon Kremer, cellist Marta Sudraba, the Youth Choir Kamēr... and conductor Māris Sirmāis. The initiator of this piece was Gidon Kremer who requested Pēteris Vasks to write an opus for a mixed choir with any kind of instrumentation the composer would prefer.

Vasks: “I chose my beloved string instruments – the violin and cello – and saw the plains of Zemgale before my eyes as I was writing.”

Zemgale is a region in the southern Latvia traditionally associated with fertility due to the vast plains of rich brown earth soils. Zemgale also has more sunny days per year than other regions of Latvia and less rainfall.

Vasks: “In the Zemgale plains, you see the starry sky right span to the horizon. It is past comprehension, but I almost want to embrace the unembraceable. So I attempt to do so in sound. Music lets one achieve things that cannot be physically done.”

Doesn't this make him feel like a powerful giant on top of a hill?

Vasks: “On the contrary! I feel humble and grateful about the possibility to live happily and surrounded by this beauty. If God has given you some special gifts, you try to place them into your scores and share them with others, not keep them to yourself.”

The musical form of *Plainscapes* is created by three elements in a specific order – prelude or intro, vocalise, interlude (choral), vocalise, interlude (choral), vocalise, interlude (cascading triplets that lead to the first big culmination), *Vision of Nature awakening* (starts on minute 12 of this recording) and a reprise exchanging the original A minor to D minor.

A special atmosphere in the *Plainscapes* is achieved by the interaction between eighth note triplets and especially quarter note triplets and regular eight notes and sixteenth notes. It creates a pictorial impression, calling to mind the landscapes of the Latvian painting patriarch Vilhelms Purvītis (1872–1945). Purvītis rarely indicated specific places of origin for his sceneries, but when listening to *Plainscapes*, it is easy to imagine Zemgale in times of high waters; the rivers have climbed out of their shores and made the earth and water one indivisible early spring matter reflecting the immense bright blue sky.

About *Vision of Nature awakening* Vasks says: “It’s already late spring filled with birdsong, perhaps even just a little before the summer solstice. After this natural awakening, a sense of infinity and eternity returns to the music with the immense starry sky. It is a slight anachronism though, since we mainly see the intensely starry sky in August, but in music, one can work with the passing of seasons freely.”

In 2011, a version of *Plainscapes* for violin, cello and piano was created by commission of the Eindhoven Music Centre. The premiere took place in 20 January 2012 in the Rabobank hall of the Frits Philips Music House in Eindhoven, performed by the Storioni Trio.

Vasks: “The movements of the meditation remain nearly unchanged, but the culmination is very different – where in the original version the choir sang the birdsongs, the piano now has a real time to shine.”

Orests Silabriedis

TRIO PALLADIO are three established Latvian soloists, avid chamber musicians and acclaimed recording artists Eva Bindere, Kristīna Blaumane and Reinis Zariņš. Each of them is the laureate of the Grand Music Award of Latvia, and in 2019 they were nominated for this prestigious award as a trio. Recent highlights include their artistic residency in the Concert Hall Cēsis, debut recitals at the London Wigmore Hall and Lutosławski Concert Studio in Warsaw, and performances of Beethoven's Triple concerto with the Latvian National Symphony orchestra.

The trio's interpretations have been broadcast live on the BBC Radio 3, as well as the Polish Radio and the Latvia Public Radio 3 Klasika. Trio Palladio creates conceptual programmes with rich variety of classical, romantic and contemporary chamber music, with particular focus on works by Latvian and Baltic composers.

Trio Palladio was named after Andrea Palladio (1508–1580) – one of the most influential architects of all time. The Renaissance genius drew inspiration from legendary Roman architect Vitruvius' concept that architecture has a crucial connection with the arts and sciences whose fundament rests on numbers and proportions. As a trio, Eva, Kristina and Reinis, they strive to embody in sounds the values expressed by Palladio and by Goethe, who intimately linked architecture and music.

Eva BINDERE is one of Latvia's most dazzling violinists, the concertmaster of Kremerata Baltica chamber orchestra for 15 years, and regular duo and chamber music partner of Gidon Kremer (appearing also on a Grammy-winning album *After Mozart*) has performed in such venues as Carnegie Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Suntory Hall Tokyo, Salzburg Mozarteum, Musikverein Wien, Royal Albert Hall and many others. Eva has a special affinity for chamber music and has collaborated with artists like Yo-Yo Ma, Pierre Amoyal, Renaud and Gautier Capuçon, Hagen Quartet, Mario Brunello, Thomas Demenga, Leif Ove Andsnes, and Martin Helmchen. A significant part of Eva's life is teaching: she is professor of violin at the Latvian Academy of Music in Riga and also a professor at the Accademia Perosi Biella, Italy. Eva gives regular masterclasses, collaborates with different orchestras

and educational projects, and has given Latvian premieres of several works, including compositions by Magnus Lindberg and violin concertos by Kurt Weill alongside with lesser known Latvian music.

Kristīna BLAUMANE is one of Latvia's top cellists – soloist, chamber musician, principal cellist. As a soloist she has performed with London Philharmonic Orchestra, Amsterdam Sinfonietta, MDR Symphony Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Kremerata Baltica, Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, Netherlands Wind Ensemble as well as all main orchestras in her native Latvia. Kristina has been invited to perform at many festivals such as Lockenhaus, Salzburg, Amsterdam Cello Biennale, Gstaad, Verbier, Basel, Jerusalem among others. She has recorded for BMG, Onyx, BIS and ECM labels. She is a two-time winner of the Latvia's Grand Music Award. Since 2007 Kristina combines her busy career with the principal cello position in London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Three-time recipient of the Latvia's Grand Music Award, concert pianist **Reinis ZARIŅŠ** exhilarates audiences in Europe and North America with his thoughtful virtuosity and unusual programming. He has been invited to perform in Lucerne, Bath and Norfolk festivals, with conductors Pierre Boulez, Peter Eötvös and Juha Kangas, and orchestras, such as London Philharmonic Orchestra, Kremerata Baltica and Moscow Virtuosi, as well as with Latvia's most prestigious orchestras. Reinis has released five critically acclaimed albums and is the co-author of several multimedia projects with dance and visual arts.

reiniszarins.com

Pēteris Vasks with Kristīna Blaumane, Eva Bindere and Reinis Zariņš



Publisher: Schott
Recording: 5–7 April 2019, Dzintari Concert Hall (The Small Hall), Jūrmala, Latvia
Executive Producer: Reijo Kiilunen
Recording Producer & Engineer: Normunds Šnē
Final Mix & Mastering: Enno Mäemets, Editroom Oy, Helsinki

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Booklet Editor: Joel Valkila
Cover: Shutterstock
Artist photos: Jānis Porietis
Special thanks to: Andris Kreislers, Riga Richard Wagner Society,
Guntars Ķīrsis & Dzintari Concert Hall

*The arrangement of Lonely Angel for piano trio was done by
Pēteris Vasks especially for this album*



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