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KORNGOLD

Piano Trio, Op. 1

SCHOENBERG

Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4

(transcribed by Eduard Steuermann)

Fidelio Trio

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957): Piano Trio, Op. 1

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951): Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4 (trans. Eduard Steuermann)

Although separated by barely more than a decade, these works represent a watershed for both composers in terms of their musical aesthetic. Korngold's *Piano Trio* was his first published work, a prodigious way to announce himself on the international stage with a style that would ultimately see him become one of Hollywood's pre-eminent film composers. *Verklärte Nacht* was no less of a stylistic breakthrough for Schoenberg, subsequently becoming his best known work, and set in motion a process that led to his rejection of classical tonality and evolving of a new method of tonal organisation.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold was born in Brünn (Brno) on 29th May 1897, the second son of music critic Julius Korngold. Aged only nine he impressed Mahler with his music and then consolidated this with his score for the ballet-pantomime *Der Schneemann*, given its première at the Vienna Court Opera in 1910. A sequence of orchestral, chamber and operatic works followed, culminating with the dual première, in Hamburg and Cologne, of his opera *Die tote Stadt*, which made him world famous at the age of 23. The success of his next opera *Der Wunder der Heliane* was blighted, however, by the worsening political situation, while his last opera *Die Kathrin* was not performed in Vienna on account of the annexation of Austria by Germany. Korngold had by now settled in Hollywood, where a series of lavish film scores written over the next decade, such as *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *King's Row* (1941), brought his music to an audience of millions. Following the Second World War, he returned to Europe and to the concert hall but his effulgent late-Romantic style found relatively little favour in the austerity of post-war Vienna, while his death, on 19th November 1957, attracted only cursory attention. Recent decades have seen a renewed interest in his music, however, with many performances and recordings marking his centenary in 1997 and the fiftieth anniversary of his death in 2007.

Korngold was not yet thirteen when he composed his *Piano Trio* during 1909-10, but it was a measure of the

reputation he already enjoyed that the Viennese première was given by no less a line-up than the violinist Arnold Rosé, cellist Adolf Buxbaum and pianist (already better known as a conductor) Bruno Walter. The work then made its way to New York, where its success helped open doors in the United States that were to stand Korngold in good stead a quarter-century hence. Although set out in the standard four movements, its individual handling of form as well as an awareness of the latest developments in harmonic practice confirm the teenage composer as being far more than just an able technician.

The first movement opens with a suave theme given initially to the piano, before being taken over by violin and cello in an impulsive dialogue with the piano providing an animated accompaniment. This subsides into a more hesitant though no less expressive theme in which the three instruments are very much equal partners, a lively codetta then rounding off the exposition which is duly repeated. The ensuing development initially turns to the minor for a wide-ranging discussion of the first theme, its successor accorded more restrained treatment that gains in fervency before a full and extensively altered reprise. This time, the rounding-off is extended into a coda which sees the movement through to a wistful close.

The scherzo begins with a lively rhythmic figure passed between the instruments, providing the means for a purposeful and dance inflected theme that duly finds contrast with a more inward and probing idea before the main theme returns with renewed zest. The central trio section is given over to a languorous theme which is most notable for its intricately worked harmonies, then the scherzo music returns as before to see the movement through to its effervescent conclusion.

The slow movement starts with a ruminative theme for the cello, sparingly accompanied by piano before the violin enters and the theme is elaborated accordingly. This takes in numerous harmonic detours on its way to a brief yet fervent climax with tremolo writing for the violin, before subsiding via a descending sequence of phrases

for the strings alone to an eloquent restatement of the initial theme over a limpid accompaniment on piano, and from there to its restful ending.

The finale starts with a vaunting idea for strings, heard against a more passive response from the piano, before the three instruments come together in a more flowing theme that expands at some length before heading into a recall of the initial idea. This provides the basis for a resourceful discussion of the material, before making way for a transformed version of the flowing theme, after which both ideas are combined in a coda which gains in impetus on its way to a decisive close.

Arnold Schoenberg was born in Vienna on 13th September 1874. Early works, such as the cantata *Gurrelieder* (1900/11) and symphonic poem *Pelleas und Melisande* (1903) adopt a late-Romantic vastness, while the *First String Quartet* (1905) and *First Chamber Symphony* (1906) pursue a more structured intensity. His music's tendency to become more chromatic led to an abandonment of tonality in the *Second String Quartet* (1908) and the song-cycle *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* (1909). Highlights of this free expressionism include the *Five Orchestral Pieces* (1909) and the monodrama *Erwartung* (1909). After the dark irony of the melodrama *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), Schoenberg worked towards the twelve-note method of composition, first employed in *Five Piano Pieces* and the *Serenade* (both 1923). After the poised *Third String Quartet* (1927) and scintillating *Variations for Orchestra* (1928), he employed the technique on a large-scale in his opera *Moses und Aron* (1932). Resident in the United States from 1933, he wrote the powerful *Violin Concerto* (1936) and the *Fourth String Quartet* (1937), then made ingenious use of tonal elements in *Ode to Napoleon* (1941) and the *Piano Concerto* (1942). His last years include a *String Trio* (1946) and *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947), this latter a testament to his humanity as the unfinished *Modern Psalm* (1950) enshrines his religious beliefs. Schoenberg died in Los Angeles on 13th July 1951.

Inspired by a poem of Richard Dehmel in his collection *Weib und die Welt* and composed within three weeks during the September of 1899, *Verklärte Nacht*

(Transfigured Night) was innovatory not only in its extended tonality but also its synthesis of programme music after Liszt and Wagner with the abstract formal idiom of Brahms. Despite a controversial première in March 1902 by the augmented Rosé Quartet, it quickly established itself as Schoenberg's most successful work. No doubt for this reason he prepared the version for string orchestra in 1917 that was revised in 1944: at the same time he authorised his former pupil, the pianist Eduard Steuermann (1892-1964), to make the present transcription for piano trio.

Dehmel's poem falls into five unequal stanzas: the second of these conveys the woman's predicament that she is carrying the child of another man, while the fourth conveys the supportive response of the man whom she now loves; framing these are three shorter verses which set the lovers' emotions within the context of the moonlit night in which they walk.

The first section opens with tolling piano chords that provide the basis for a sombre theme which is presently joined by the strings. This opens out expressively towards a consoling figure on the piano, only to be succeeded by a climax with an impassioned theme at its centre. The music subsides, though a tense chord on pizzicato strings leaves the mood unsettled.

The second section (3' 5") begins with a restless theme on strings that quickly gains in emotional impetus before heading to an uncertain call-and-response between the violin and cello. A further surge of intensity leads into a warmer and more hopeful theme, though any hope of a more stable continuation is constantly undercut by a chromatic phrase on the strings which eventually provokes the stormiest outburst yet. This features tremolo writing for piano and imploring phrases from strings as the music gains remorselessly in tension as it reaches the work's first main climax, the restless theme heard in desperation as the intensity subsides into questioning phrases from violin then cello in a mood of oppressive uncertainty.

The third section (12' 33") is a brief though potent interlude that reflects on the emotional gravitas of the scenario which has just been enacted. Violin and cello

combine in an effortful theme over heaving piano, before fleeting recollections of ideas from the preceding sections see the emotional intensity subside as the music reaches a pause of anticipatory dread.

The fourth section (14' 48") brings an immediate change of tone with its decisive turn to the major and affirmative new theme on cello which is soon taken up and elaborated by the other instruments. A magical shift in perspective follows as limpid piano arpeggios underpin the warm exchanges of violin and cello in a mood of tender fulfilment, then the music begins to gather together its thematic and expressive threads as earlier ideas which were once doubtful and uncertain are made positive and

life-enhancing. This culminates with the cello theme in partnership with a heightened counter-melody from violin as the work's second main climax is reached, with the cello theme remaining through to a beneficent close.

The fifth section (22' 21") reviews several previous ideas in an epilogue which gradually moves from the cello theme as just recalled, via the earlier exchanges of cello and violin, towards a brief yet ecstatic climax. This heads into a major-key transformation of the work's initial motif, then a gentle recollection of the piano arpeggios leads to a radiant conclusion.

Richard Whitehouse

Fidelio Trio

Photo: Sophie Dennehy



The Fidelio Trio features Irish musicians Darragh Morgan (violin) and Mary Dullea (piano) and Scottish cellist Robin Michael. Since their South Bank debut they have appeared at Wigmore Hall, Kings Place, the Purcell Room and Royal Opera House, London and are regularly invited to the UK's most prestigious venues. Festival appearances include the City of London, Cheltenham, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Brighton, Vale of Glamorgan, West Cork Music, the Belfast Festival at Queens and venues such as the National Concert Hall, Dublin, Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre, Casa da Música (Porto), Centre Culturel Irlandais (Paris), Palazzo Albrizzi, Venice, Johannesburg Music Society, Symphony Space, New York City and MIT Boston. Their international tours include the

United States, South Africa and China. They broadcast regularly on BBC Radio 3, RTÉ Lyric FM, WNYC, NPR and in 2010 were featured in a Sky Arts documentary. The Fidelio Trio are closely associated with contemporary composers, including Charles Wuorinen, Johannes Maria Staud, Donnacha Dennehy and Michael Nyman. They have recorded for NMC, col legno, Delphian and Divine Art, have been Davenport Residency holders at the State University of New York, SUNY and are artists-in-residence for 2012-15 at St Patrick's College Dublin where they are artistic directors of an annual Winter Chamber Music Festival.

www.fideliotrio.com

Korngold's *Piano Trio, Op. 1* was his first published work, completed before he had even reached thirteen years of age. Premiered by leading instrumental luminaries in Vienna, it announced a precocious and major talent in its handling of up-to-date harmonies and musical form. Composed a decade earlier, Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* was similarly innovative in its use of tonality. Originally scored for string sextet, it proved so popular that the composer authorised his former pupil, the pianist Eduard Steuermann, to make the present transcription for piano trio.

Erich Wolfgang
KORNGOLD
(1897-1957)

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|---|--------------|
| Piano Trio, Op. 1 (1909-10) | 31:31 |
| ❶ Allegro non troppo, con espressione | 10:49 |
| ❷ Scherzo: Allegro. Trio: Viel langsamer, innig. Allegro | 7:01 |
| ❸ Larghetto, sehr langsam | 6:05 |
| ❹ Finale: Allegro molto e energico | 7:36 |

Arnold
SCHOENBERG
(1874-1951)

| | |
|---|--------------|
| ❺ Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4 (1899/1932) | 29:01 |
| (trans. Eduard Steuermann (1892-1964)) | |

Fidelio Trio

Darragh Morgan, Violin • Robin Michael, Cello
Mary Dullea, Piano

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