

# Antipodes String Trio

**Serenade for String Trio Opus 10 in C**      **Ernst von Dohnányi**  
**(1877 – 1960)**

*Marcia Romanze Scherzo Thema con Variazioni Rondo*

Dohnányi was a Hungarian composer influenced in his youth by Brahms, Reger and Wagner. He wrote chamber music from an early age although his own instrument was the piano. During his lifetime his fame as a composer was overshadowed by his fame as a pianist, conductor and teacher. In 1919 he became director of the Budapest Conservatorium. Like his fellow countryman and colleague Bartók, he emigrated to the United States where he taught piano and composition, and where he died.

Composed in 1904, the *Serenade* is an early work. Dohnányi could be a musical satirist with a keen sense of humour, and he also had a flair for operatic writing. Both qualities are to be found in plenty in the *Serenade*. In beginning it with a March, Dohnányi followed the classical precedent for the form. The fun of the first movement sets the tone for the whole piece, with the exception of the beautiful Theme and Variations, the most serious and romantic movement in the work. The Scherzo is brilliant contrapuntal writing. Chromatic tunes and ostinato basses colour the work, and much double-stopping gives a rich texture.

**String Trio**      **Douglas Lilburn**  
**(1915 – 2001)**

Douglas Lilburn has been described as “the elder statesman of New Zealand music” and the “grandfather of New Zealand music”.

Lilburn’s *String Trio* was the first New Zealand chamber work to be published. It was composed in Christchurch, and was said by the composer to reflect, in the first two movements, “a phase of Schubert-worship that Lili Kraus brought to Christchurch in the mid-40s.

The opening *Allegro* is in sonata form. Firmly rooted harmonically – even to a hint of the traditional modulations in the development section – it is far from traditional melodically. It is in this area of the long flowing, despairing tune, nervous with “shakes”, that Lilburn’s music is distinctive, and was already so in 1945. The contrasting theme on which the movement is built is lively and virile, reminiscent of his setting of *Landfall in Unknown Seas* of about the same period.

In the *Allegretto*, fluid harmonies ebb and flow into one another while the melodic material gracefully weaves its plaintive way through light textures, in an ABA format. The final *Allegro* begins cheerfully enough, but during the course of its several rondo-like tunes it tends to revert to nostalgia. Nonetheless, this movement has charm and authority.

**Passacaglia in G minor on a Theme by Handel Halvorsen  
(1864 – 1935)**

Norwegian violinist, conductor, and composer Johan Halvorsen began playing the violin at seven, and soon took up other instruments and joined local bands. Although he was largely self-taught, Halvorsen took lessons in violin and theory in Stockholm, Leipzig, Berlin and Liège. While visiting Bergen, he made the acquaintance of Grieg, who became a lifelong friend. After being appointed as Professor of Violin at the Helsinki Music Institute, he began to compose, whilst also remaining active as a performer. Halvorsen returned to Bergen in 1892 and was appointed conductor of that city's theatre. Later, he was conductor at Norway's National Theatre for 30 years, and it was in that setting that he was best known as a composer, producing works for over 30 plays, including Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice", "Macbeth", and "Much Ado About Nothing". In 1897, Halvorsen began his *Passacaglia*, which he based on the last movement of Handel's *Harpichord Suite in G minor* HWV 432. Originally scored for violin and viola duo, the work has also been arranged for violin and cello. The composer himself played the viola part for the work's première. The passacaglia is a baroque dance that originated in Spain, and is usually based on an ostinato bass line and written in a slow triple metre.

Beginning with a simple arrangement of the original theme and variations, the work gradually unfolds into an elaborate set of variations, each one more virtuosic than the last. Halvorsen uses double-stopping to emulate the rich sound of a string quartet, and incorporates melancholic elements derived from Norwegian folk music.

**String Trio in B flat D581 Schubert  
(1797 -1828)**

*Allegro moderato Andante Menuetto (Allegretto) Rondo (Allegretto)*

*"No one understands another's grief, no one understands another's joy ... My music is the product of my talent and my misery. And that which I have written in my greatest distress is what the world seems to like best".*

This trio was composed in 1817 when Schubert was 20 years old. He was just beginning his life as a freelance composer, having previously taught at his father's school. He disliked teaching, but the two years he spent as a teacher were a period of intense composition, during which he produced a prodigious number of works including symphonies, operettas, an opera, much church and chamber music and countless songs.

This trio shows a marked advance on his previous writing and is considered to be his finest chamber music writing before the 'Trout' Quintet. The graceful first theme of the *Allegro moderato* is reminiscent of Haydn and the second derives from it. The short development has some interesting modulations which foreshadow his future genius for original and expressive harmonic changes. The *Andante* is built on two ideas, a simple expressive song contrasted with a surprising passage in triplets suggesting questioning relentlessness. The minuet and its following trio show Schubert's already sure touch for this graceful Viennese music. The bright, dancing theme of the *Rondo* alternates with episodes of a developmental nature which contain many colourful harmonic changes typical of Schubert's writing.

### **String Trio in C minor Opus 9 No 3**

**Beethoven  
(1770 – 1827)**

*Allegro con spirito Adagio con espressione Scherzo: Allegro molto vivace Presto*

Among Beethoven's compositions of 1798 were the three string trios Op 9 dedicated to Count Browne, whom Beethoven called "the foremost Maecenas of my muse".

The terse opening movement of the trio is well organised and highly dramatic with its driving rhythms and dark, chromatic colourings. The *Adagio con espressione* is a movement of noble serenity. Beethoven fills out the opening into a pseudo-quartet texture by the liberal use of double-stops. The 6/8 *Scherzo*, no longer bears any traces of its minuet ancestry, while the urgency of the *Finale* is underlined by its preference for minor keys. The quiet major-key ending, like that of the C minor Piano Trio, is a typical Beethovenian surprise and one which doubtless met with approval of his old teacher, Joseph Haydn.

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The Antipodes Trio brings together two of New Zealand's leading young string players, Christabel Lin and Nicholas Hancox, with one of the USA's most outstanding young cellists, David Requiro. Formed through connections between the New Zealand School of Music, the Vienna Conservatory of Music and the University of Michigan, they aim to promote the under utilised repertoire of the string trio which has contributions from many of the great composers throughout music history.

Christabel Lin currently resides in Vienna where she is studying at the Vienna Conservatory of Music. Studies in New Zealand included Auckland University and the NZSM.

Violist Nicholas Hancox completed his Master of Music at the University of Michigan in 2009 following Bachelor of Music (Hons) studies at Victoria University. He also holds the LRSM and ATCL diplomas on Violin.

A native of Oakland, CA, David Requiro studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music, University of Michigan and the Paris Conservatoire. As winner of the 2008 Naumburg award, he now belongs to a distinguished catalogue of elite musicians that include Steven Hough, Joseph Silverstein, the Emerson String Quartet and our very own Wilma Smith (as a member of the Lydian String Quartet).