

## Cook Strait Trio

### Phantasie Trio in A minor

John Ireland (1879 – 1962)

John Ireland was one of the foremost English composers writing in the first half of the twentieth century. An unhappy childhood in which he suffered the death of both of his parents contributed to Ireland's rather lonely and introspective outlook, and this in turn affected his compositional style.

Ireland received a thorough training at the Royal College of Music, studying composition with Sir Charles Stanford, who was known for being a particularly strict task-master. Later, he made his living as an organist and choirmaster, before taking up a post at the RCM where his pupils included Benjamin Britten.

Known mostly for songs and piano pieces, including perhaps his best-known song *Sea Fever*, Ireland's most important early successes were in the field of chamber music. In 1905, wealthy businessman Walter Willson Cobbett founded a chamber music competition designed to promote young British composers, and Ireland entered his *Phantasie Trio* in 1907. Frank Bridge won the competition, and Ireland was placed second equal with James Friskin's *Phantasie*, also in A minor. (Incidentally, Friskin was married to Rebecca Clarke, whose trio also features in this programme.) Ireland's *Violin Sonata No 1* won first prize in 1910.

The *Phantasie Trio* was dedicated to Ireland's old teacher Stanford, and it remains one of Ireland's most immediately attractive and popular compositions. Beautifully constructed, with four sections in a single continuous movement, as determined by the rules of the competition, the trio is distinguished by its lyricism and the way in which the composer wholly integrates the piano.

### Piano Trio (1921)

Rebecca Clarke (1886 – 1979)

*Moderato ma appassionato*

*Andante molto semplice*

*Allegro vigoroso*

Rebecca Clarke was born in England, but lived in America for much of her life as a result of links with her American father's family, and her marriage to the pianist James Friskin in New York in 1944. She began her career at a time when women working as professional musicians faced many barriers to acceptance both as performers and as composers. She studied violin, viola and composition at the Royal Academy in London, and although she made a living as a very successful orchestral and chamber musician, as a composer, her contributions to the British music canon were quickly forgotten.

A revival of interest in her life and music came about in 1976 almost by accident when, at the age of 90, she was asked to take part in a radio programme celebrating the life of the pianist Dame Myra Hess. In answer to one of the questions she presented a printed programme from 1925 in which Hess had taken part – a programme made up entirely of Clarke's music, held at the Wigmore Hall in London. As a result, a subsequent radio programme was made about Clarke herself, and in the last few years of her life she finally came to enjoy some of the acclaim she deserved. Two works that marked her success early

on were a viola sonata (1919) and this piano trio (1921), both of which were entered into a competition sponsored by American chamber music patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. She tied for first place with the composer Ernst Bloch for her viola sonata, although a casting vote gave the prize to Bloch. After the competition, Clarke recalls Coolidge saying: "And you *should* have seen their faces when they saw it was by a woman"! The Piano Trio won second place two years later. The sonata has now become one of the most frequently performed works in the viola repertoire, and although many of her manuscripts remain unpublished, recordings and performances of her works ensure her ongoing recognition as a composer of substance.

## INTERVAL

### **Piano Trio in D minor Op 49**

**Felix Mendelssohn (1809 -1847)**

*Molto allegro agitato*

*Andante con moto tranquillo*

*Scherzo – Leggiero e vivace*

*Finale – Allegro assai appassionato*

Schumann called Mendelssohn "the Mozart of the nineteenth century" and hailed this trio as "the master trio of the age as were the B-flat and D Major trios of Beethoven and the E-flat trio of Schubert in their time". It was published in 1839, eight years before Schumann's D minor Trio. Although this was a time of intensive trio composition, Mendelssohn's were the only important addition to the repertoire between those Schumann named and those of Brahms published in the late 1800s.

Mendelssohn had a tremendous natural musical ability with a wonderful gift for melody and he upheld the musical spirit of the Romantic age. As well, his personality was such that he was able to bring the quietly cultural city of Leipzig into the mainstream: as conductor of the Gewandhaus he brought to life the music of Bach, Beethoven and Schubert.

This Trio is warm and rich, fluent and skilful, wonderfully enjoyable. The piano plays an important role and although it often has a brilliance more normally associated with a concerto, it never really overpowers the strings. The opening movement uses inventive counter melodies while the slow movement could be one of the composer's best *Songs Without Words*. The *scherzo* is lighthearted and playful, while the *finale* sings with an almost Schubertian character. It all ends in a virtuosic display.

**Cook Strait Trio** consists of Blythe Press, violin; Hugo Zanker, cello; and Amber Rainey, piano. These three talented young musicians have all had distinguished student careers in New Zealand, either as soloists, or in chamber music ensembles, and are now continuing their studies in Europe. The name Cook Strait Trio places the ensemble as New Zealanders, as well as linking the Nelson Summer School and Wellington city, the foundation places of their chamber music education.

Blythe Press, violin, completed a Bachelor in Performance Music (Distinction) in 2009 at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz, Austria, where he is now studying his Masters. In 2007 he was co-concertmaster of the New Zealand Youth Orchestra and has played in and toured with the NZSO.

After studying at the University of Canterbury, Hugo Zanker recently received his Masters in Cello Performance from the Freiburg (Germany) Music University. Since then he has been working as a cellist in the Magdeburger Philharmonic Orchestra (Germany), where he also lives. Alongside his talents as a musician, Hugo has a Bachelor from the Canterbury University School of Fine Arts majoring in film production.

Amber Rainey, piano, completed her Bachelor of Music at Auckland University in 2007, studying with Rae de Lisle and Sarah Watkins. In 2008 she completed her Honours degree in Collaborative Piano Performance and Analysis and is now studying for a Masters degree in piano accompanying at the Guildhall School of Music in London.