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Gould Piano Trio

James MacMillan Fourteen Little Pictures

Schubert Piano Trio in E flat major D. 929



JAMES MACMILLAN (b. 1959)

Fourteen Little Pictures (1997)

Although *Fourteen Little Pictures* is a set of separate miniatures they are stitched together and interwoven to form a single through-composed work, lasting a little over twenty minutes. The fourteen short movements were conceived as individual and complete entities but a number of common threads were extended between them to establish references, resonances and recapitulations. This was to allow a sense of scale and unity to be projected onto a larger canvas.

The music presents the members of the trio in a series of different contexts, sometimes all three having equal importance (movements I and V), sometimes individuals coming to the fore (cello in III, piano in IV, violin in VII), sometimes reduced to a duo (VIII) or even to a solitary player (piano in IX). The music covers a wide range of moods ranging from *feroce*, *virtuoso*, *strepitoso* on one hand to *delicato e fragile* on the other; from the violent and eruptive to the childlike and desolate. The eleventh Picture is the climax of the music's progress where the trio all play *ffff*; *desolato*, *martellato*, *feroce etc ...* The fourteenth and final Picture brings the music full circle, at first presenting some of the material from the first Picture but quickly transforming it into a long piano postlude marked *teneroso*, *delicato*, *lontano e semplice*.

The work was commissioned by the BBC to mark the 25th anniversary of the collaboration of Peter Frankl, György Pauk and Ralph Kirshbaum, and was first performed by them on 21 May 1997 at Wigmore Hall.

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

Piano Trio in E flat major D. 929 (1827)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro moderato

Allegro moderato

The two piano trios Schubert composed towards the end of his life belong among the undisputed masterpieces of the repertoire. It has always been assumed that the E flat major work D. 929 is the later of the pair, but the chronology of the two pieces



is by no means certain. We do know that a piano trio, advertised as being new, was included in an all-Schubert concert given on 26 March 1828 – the only such public event to take place during the composer's lifetime. The programme also contained the opening movement of the String Quartet in G major D. 887, as well as a generous selection of choral music and songs.

From the autograph score of the Piano Trio in E flat, we know that it was completed in November 1827. The work was performed on 26 December that year, by Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Joseph Linke (both members of the famous Schuppanzigh Quartet), together with the pianist Carl Maria von Bocklet, for whom Schubert had written his fine Piano Sonata in D major D. 850 some two years earlier. The same artists gave a second performance the following month, at a private 'Schubertiade' given in the house of the composer's friend Josef von Spaun. It can only have been this E flat major Trio that Schubert offered to the publishers Schott & Co. the following February. Schott had written to him that month, apologising for not having contacted him earlier, and pointing out that their employees had been busy engraving Beethoven's last works (among them the Ninth Symphony and the string quartets Opp. 127 and 131). They asked him to submit some of his music – in particular piano pieces and songs. Schubert responded with a long list of available works, including a piano trio 'which has been performed here with much applause'.

It was Schubert's lawyer friend Leopold von Sonnleithner who confidently identified the trio performed at Schubert's concert of 26 March 1828 as having been the one in E flat major, and his recollection has generally been accepted. However, it is unlikely that Schubert would have repeated the same piece yet again at a concert consisting almost entirely of new compositions; and we need to take into account the fact that Sonnleithner was writing several decades after the event, and could not even remember which string quartet movement had been included in the programme.

The whole question of the chronology of Schubert's two trios is complicated by the curious fact that on the very same day that Schott & Co. wrote to the composer, another German publisher – Probst of Leipzig – sent him a letter asking for 'successful compositions: songs, vocal pieces, romances, which, without sacrificing your individuality are not too hard to grasp'. Schubert wrote to both Schott and



Probst on 10 April. To Schott he offered the trio ‘that was played in front of a tightly packed hall in my concert, with extraordinary applause’, asking 100 florins for the work. To Probst, he merely described the trio’s success. Even so, it was Probst who eagerly seized on what he saw as the opportunity to publish the trio, and Schubert found himself in a dilemma. Did he hurriedly write a new trio for Probst, having offered one to Schott? And was Sonnleithner mistaken in thinking that the work performed at the concert of March 1828 had been the one in E flat major? The truth is that Schubert’s other great piano trio, in B flat major, is one of his few large-scale masterpieces about whose origin virtually nothing is known, and the possibility that he composed it in the early months of 1828 especially for his March concert that year cannot be dismissed.

As things turned out, it was Probst who published the Trio in E flat, in December 1828; while its companion did not appear until 1836, when it was issued by Anton Diabelli. While the autograph of the B flat major work has long since been lost, in the case of the E flat major we have not only Schubert’s final manuscript, but also a working draft of the first three movements. The latter is a fascinating document, and it reveals how radically he altered some of the music’s detail as he worked. This is particularly true of the slow movement, whose entire shape was changed between the draft and the final version. In the opening movement, the most far-reaching modification was to alter the key in which the *pianissimo* second theme appears, from F sharp minor to B minor. The repeated-note rhythm of this theme casts its shadow over the entire work; and it is in the key of B minor that Schubert is later to introduce one of his most profound surprises – the reappearance of the slow movement’s theme during the course of the finale.

According to Sonnleithner, the composer based the slow movement’s splendid theme, with its march-like piano accompaniment, on a Swedish folk melody which he had heard sung by the young Danish tenor Isaak Berg, who was visiting Vienna at the time. Schubert’s draft of the *Andante* shows that, following the opening theme, the order of material in the piece was eventually reversed: the *fortissimo* outburst based on the rhythm of the dropping octave that punctuates the main theme’s phrases had originally preceded the calm dialogue between violin and cello, with its smoothly rippling piano accompaniment. The definitive version, sustaining as it does the subdued atmosphere of the movement’s opening for



considerably longer, is infinitely more effective. Also new was the agitated climax at the movement's centre. The coda, in a slower tempo, with the Swedish theme's outline played by the piano against a chromatically enhanced harmonisation from the pizzicato strings, provides one of those moments of heartbreaking poignancy, the secret of which Schubert and Mozart alone among great composers seem to have possessed.

Since the main theme of his triple-time opening movement had contained scherzo-like undertones, Schubert had no need to include a genuinely scherzo-like piece in the Trio's design, as he did in the case of the B flat Trio. True, the third movement is a *Scherzo*, additionally marked *scherzando*, but its tempo is relaxed – as Schubert was at pains to point out in a letter to Probst: 'The minuet [!] is to be played in a moderate tempo, and *piano* throughout; the trio, on the other hand, forcefully, apart from the indicated *p* and *pp*.' Schubert presents the *Scherzo* theme in canon throughout, and exquisitely scored; while the more energetic trio introduces, in its second half, the repeated-note figure that had figured so prominently in the work's opening movement.

The finale is conceived on a scale which, even by Schubert's standards, is extraordinarily expansive. Indeed, so worried was he about its length that he left posterity with a Brucknerian problem: not only did he strike out the indication that the exposition was to be repeated, but he also marked two substantial cuts in the development section which, as he told Probst, were scrupulously to be observed. The movement contains three main ideas: the amiable main theme, a contrasting subject in rapid repeated notes, bringing with it a change in metre (though not in pulse), and a subject in rushing semiquavers accompanied in its latter stages by a 'rocking' two-note figure on the piano. To these, the development section adds one of Schubert's most startling innovations: the return of the slow movement's theme, transformed into the finale's prevailing rhythm, and accompanied by the piano's 'rocking' idea. On no other occasion in a work designed in discrete movements did Schubert bring into play a similar use of cyclic form. The slow movement's theme makes a resplendent return at the end, in a wonderfully transfigured version in the major. It is a moment in which the heavens appear to open before our very ears.

Notes on MacMillan Fourteen Little Pictures by James MacMillan © 1997

Notes on Schubert Piano Trio by Misha Donat © 2009



GOULD PIANO TRIO

Lucy Gould *violin*

Alice Neary *cello*

Benjamin Frith *piano*



From their early success at the Charles Hennen and the inaugural Melbourne Competitions through being selected as British 'Rising Stars' in 1998, the Gould Piano Trio has emerged as one of the finest chamber ensembles, boasting an impressive discography, with festival appearances at Edinburgh, Cheltenham, City of London, Bath, Aldeburgh, Spoleto and the BBC Proms.

In their regular and extensive tours to the USA they have covered the major venues in New York including the Lincoln Center, Frick Collection and Weill Hall. In Europe, highlights have included the Queens Hall Edinburgh; Concertgebouw Amsterdam and the Palais des Beaux Arts Brussels, and recitals in Paris, Cologne, Athens and Vienna, as well as performing regularly at London's Wigmore Hall.

But whether at home or in the Far East and New Zealand the trio have constantly striven to engage new audiences through outreach programmes, often working with school children – as filmed by the BBC during the 2006 Leeds International Piano Competition. A recent tour of North America's West Coast saw them giving a presentation of James MacMillan's trio, *Fourteen Little Pictures*, to students in the University of Southern Oregon, a piece they have championed since performing it at the BBC Symphony's MacMillan Festival at the Barbican.



Indeed, while playing most of the established masterworks of the trio repertoire – their discography includes the complete trios of both Mendelssohn and Brahms – they have an artistic ambition to extend boundaries, challenging audiences (and themselves!) with contemporary works and commissioning such trios as *Chapman's Pool* by Judith Bingham. The 2007–8 season saw a new commission to celebrate the tenth annual Corbridge Chamber Music Festival in Northumberland (which the trio established with clarinettist Robert Plane): *Radical Light* for clarinet and piano trio by Benjamin Wallfisch. The connection with Robert Plane has borne fruit in the trio's Naxos project of recent years to record the late English Romantics, combining the piano trios of Stanford and Bax with their clarinet chamber music, short-listed for a *Gramophone* award. The idea will be furthered by the inclusion of the complete piano trios of John Ireland.

The Trio's special affinity with Romantic composers is enhanced by the discovery of lesser-known contemporaries such as Niels Gade (BBC Radio 3 from Glasgow) and Robert Fuchs (on the Quartz label – 'Editor's Choice' in *Gramophone*), enabling the more popular repertoire of composers such as Schumann and Dvořák to be viewed in a new perspective.

The Gould's residency at the RNCM in Manchester gives them the opportunity to build relationships with young ensembles, introducing them to a wider repertoire, probing deeper into the meaning of the scores and giving regular performances in the city's busy concert schedule.

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Gould Piano Trio

Recorded live at Wigmore Hall, London, on 17 July 2008

JAMES MACMILLAN

Fourteen Little Pictures

		23.18
01	I feroce, virtuoso, strepitoso ♩ = c.60	01.17
02	II [decrescendo into <i>ppp delicato</i>] (fragile) ♩ = ♩	01.08
03	III molto espressivo ♩ = 40–48	01.11
04	IV ♩ = 144 sonore	01.14
05	V meno mosso ♩ = c.120	01.14
06	VI very slow	01.39
07	VII ♩ = 40–48 (eruptive)	01.02
08	VIII Adagio, molto espressivo	01.25
09	IX ♩ = 40–48 (emphatic)	01.01
10	X feroce, virtuoso, strepitoso ♩ = c.60	01.39
11	XI prestissimo possibile	01.22
12	XII	01.18
13	XIII	02.14
14	XIV feroce, virtuoso, strepitoso ♩ = c.60	05.27

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Piano Trio in E flat major D. 929

		50.21
15	Allegro	16.35
16	Andante con moto	09.21
17	Scherzo: Allegro molto	07.05
18	Finale: Allegro moderato	16.56

Total time: 73.42