

Christopher's Classics - Series XXVIII 2023

# Ghost Trio



Gabriela Glapska (piano), Ken Ichinose (cello), Monique Lapins (violin)

*Performing:* Beethoven, Norris,  
Tansman and Brahms

Presented by  
Sunday Classics Inc

Elizabeth Ball Trust



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Tuesday, October 3rd, 2023, 7:30 PM  
**The Piano**, 156 Armagh St, Christchurch

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*The busiest lives deserve beautiful music.*

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# Programme

**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)** – *Piano Trio in D major, Op. 70, No. 1 “Ghost”*

**Michael Norris (b 1973)** – *Dirty Pixels*

*Interval*

**Alexandre Tansman (1897-1986)** – *Piano Trio No. 2*

**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)** – *Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101*

## Ghost Trio

Named for Beethoven’s famous work for piano trio, the **Ghost Trio** was founded in mid-2019 as one of Gabriela’s PhD recital projects.

Having quickly realised that they immensely enjoy playing together, they decided to continue working as a trio. All three are accomplished soloists and chamber musicians with diverse backgrounds. They have gained a reputation as one of the most refreshing and enjoyable chamber groups in Aotearoa.

**Monique Lapins** joined the NZ String Quartet in 2016 as their second violin. She began her violin studies at the age of six. Monique plays a 1784 Lorenzo Storioni violin, kindly loaned by Mr David Duncan Craig, as trustee of the Lily Duncan Trust.

Since 2014, London-born **Ken Ichinose** has been the Associate Principal Cellist with the NZ Symphony Orchestra. Ken performs on an unnamed Italian instrument dating back to circa 1780, which was previously played by prominent German cellist Bernhard Braunholz in the Kehr Trio.

**Gabriela Glapska** began her musical education at the age of 6 in Poland. In 2016 she began her doctoral studies at Victoria University of Wellington under the supervision of Dr Jian Liu and Professor Donald Maurice. Her main interests are chamber music and piano accompaniment but she is also an active soloist.

# Programme Notes

## **Beethoven *Piano Trio in D major, Op. 70, No. 1 "Ghost" (1808)***

- I. *Allegro vivace e con brio*
- II. *Largo assai ed espressivo*
- III. *Presto*

Beethoven launched back into the piano trio medium after a 10 year hiatus - and he did this with a bang - writing the famously nicknamed "Ghost" Piano Trio. During this time, he began to shift away from the typical structural constraints of the classical medium, and was experimenting with more flexibility in length and intensity, as well as pushing the boundaries of technical and musical expression. Beethoven was also coming to grips with the severity of his diminishing hearing, and was constantly battling with the fear and shame he suffered as a consequence. This trio (which is bookmarked between his 5th and 7th symphonies) truly encapsulates the themes of heroism and struggle that were commonly expressed in Beethoven's middle period.

The first movement opens with a shocking outburst of all three players in unison. This not only serves musically with the feeling of a horse launching from the gate, but also presents the entire main thematic material of this movement in the space of a few quick-fire seconds. The first movement is full of excitement and defiance - though, for a brief moment, there is a small hint of the ghostly undertones to be revealed in the Largo. Beethoven quickly shakes this off, and ends as he boisterously began.

The second movement opens with an eerie sustained line from the strings - as if to summon a menacing spirit, which trembles in the piano's response. Czerny (Beethoven's pupil) unwittingly coined the nickname of this trio, when he wrote: "[It's] Like an apparition from the lower world...we may not unsuitably think of the first appearance of the Ghost of Hamlet." We are taken into a dark and mysterious world full of trembling inner-voice accompaniment, horrified fortissimo outbursts, and a lilting motif that stumbles with every triplet and eventually closes with a nervous distant energy.

The last movement serves as a charming relief from the darkness before, with a character that is lively and full of wit and rambunctious humour. It transports us to an unusually mischievous side of the composer. The opening theme shows itself in many guises throughout, starting always with a sense of joy and quickly losing itself into an unanswered question in the rudest of fashions! What happens between is almost like a game of cat-and-mouse, with fleeting jokes thrown between all players. In the context of the heroism of the first movement, and the darkness of the slow movement, the finale feels almost bittersweet. As Beethoven said: "We mortals with immortal minds are only born for sufferings and joys, and one could almost say that the most excellent receive joy through sufferings."

*-Monique Lapins*

## **Michael Norris *Dirty Pixels* (2004)**

*Dirty Pixels* was written in response to two stimuli: an exhibition of the same name (curator, Stella Brennan) in the Adam Art Gallery featuring New Zealand artwork of a certain rough-hewn, 'gritty' nature; and hearing the work *Jagden und Formen* by German composer Wolfgang Rihm, an unremittingly wild and preposterous discourse of extremes.

These two stimuli caused something of an aesthetic dilemma: leaving behind my rather French fondness for euphonious washes of sound, I became interested in the characteristics of 'roughness' and 'raggedness', and in how a 'pure' conceptual scheme, such as the quite systematic construction I had formulated just prior to starting this piece, became 'dirtied' by intuition, by the exigencies of the material and by the reality of having it performed.

© Michael Norris

# Alexandre Tansman *Piano Trio No. 2* (1938)

- I. *Introduction and Allegro*  
*Andante espressivo - Allegro deciso*
- II. *Scherzo: Allegro vivace*
- III. *Arioso: Adagio quasi largo*
- IV. *Finale: Allegro moderato ma ben ritmato*

Though he began his musical studies at the Łódź Conservatory, his doctoral study was in law at the University of Warsaw. Shortly after completing his studies, Alexandre Tansman moved to Paris, where his musical ideas were accepted and encouraged by mentors and musical influences -- Igor Stravinsky and Maurice Ravel, as opposed to the more conservative musical climate in his native Poland. While in Paris, Tansman associated with a crowd of foreign-born musicians known as the École de Paris; though Honegger and Milhaud tried to persuade him to join Les Six, he declined, stating a need for creative independence.

Alexandre Tansman always described himself as a Polish composer, though he spoke French at home and married a French pianist, Colette Cras. In 1941, fleeing Europe as his Jewish background put him in danger with Hitler's rise to power, he moved to Los Angeles (thanks to the efforts of his friend Charlie Chaplin in getting him a visa), where he made the acquaintance of Arnold Schoenberg. There he focused chiefly on composing film music. He was friends with other composers, notably Darius Milhaud, Bela Bartok, Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky. His friendship with Stravinsky led him to writing Stravinsky's biography, published in Paris in 1948.

Though Alexandre Tansman returned to Paris after the war, his disappearance from the European musical scene left him behind the musical currents of the time, and no longer fresh in the minds of the public, which slowed his previously fast-rising career. No longer in tune with the French fashions, which had moved on to the avant-garde style, Tansman returned to his musical roots, drawing on his Jewish and Polish background to create some of his greatest works. During this time he began to reestablish connections to Poland, though his career and family kept him in France, where he lived until his death in 1986.

In general, Tansman's music belongs to the realm of neoclassicism, enriched by a plurality of influences and models, including jazz, folk dances, and the music of the Far East. The author of a Javanese Dance, he also composed a Blues, an Oberek, and the virtuosic Mazurka & Toccata. During the post-war years he displayed no interest in avant-garde experimentation and remained faithful to his unique brand of the neoclassical style. Tansman's extensive list of works contains compositions for the stage (operas and ballets), pieces for orchestra, chamber music, and songs in several languages. His music links intuition and spontaneity with a logical order of structure, virtuosity, and elegance. His individual style is characterized by clarity of form, lyrical expression, and the use of rich and varied instrumental colors.

One of Tansman's letters states that "it is obvious that I owe much to France, but anyone who has ever heard my compositions cannot have doubt that I have been, am and forever will be a Polish composer." Moreover, Tansman summarised his aesthetic programme in the following way:

1. a strong reaction against the pathos of the Post-Romantic era;
2. against its descriptive and impressionistic concepts;
3. against the subjectivism of creative ideology;
4. the struggle against music as a 'means of expression' by the very individualisation of this particular means of expression;
5. bringing down the spiritual element to its immanent and objective value;
6. striving to exclude from the musical art extra-musical elements, namely any painting, literary and philosophical qualities obliterating the absolute character of music;
7. strong marking of the formal and constructive factor."

Piano Trio undoubtedly contains all of these "postulates". The first movement, beginning with the serene introduction shows us the mature musical craftsmanship written in a typical French neoclassicism. The motoric allegro section introduces the polyphonic texture. Second movement, scherzo, begins with pizzicati in the strings instruments interrupted by figurative passages and syncopated accents in the piano. One can hear the influences of Bartok, Schostakovich and Schoenberg. The slow movement, arioso, is filled with polyphony and development of the voices in all instruments. This quasi-baroque movement provides beautiful contrast and "the calm before the storm" that is the last movement. Finale "jams" every now and then, breaking the symmetry of phrases. All this leads to the climax crowned with a spectacular code.

-Gabriela Glapska

## **Brahms Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101 (1886)**

- I. *Allegro energico*
- II. *Presto non assai*
- III. *Andante grazioso*
- IV. *Finale: Allegro molto*

Brahms wrote his C minor Piano Trio during a summer retreat at Hofstetten near Lake Thun in Switzerland - surrounded by glorious mountains and scenes of nature. This was an incredibly productive retreat, where alongside this piano trio, he also wrote his Cello Sonata in F major, and the radiant Violin Sonata in A major. However, the C minor Piano Trio is deeply contrasting in mood with its stormy, dark and intense expression.

This is Brahms' final piano trio of the set of three that he published. It's of significant contrast to the others in that it is tightly coiled and compact in its structure and is nearly half the length of the other two trios. A three-note motif is the nucleus of this entire work - heard in the opening chords - not only in musical quotation and development, but also in the phrase structures; which are frequently in sets of three. We hear Brahms' iconic use of metric dissonance juxtaposed with rich and deeply expressive harmonic language.

The first movement begins with great angst and gravitas which pervades throughout. Even in the warm and lyrical second theme, we are eventually met with elements of vulnerability, tension and outcry. Brahms interestingly toyed with the idea of repeating the exposition, but decided instead to catapult us straight into the stormy depths of the development. The central movements are even more unwavering in their expression. The second movement is delicate and nervous in colour, with muted strings creating a breathless character...perhaps a reaction to the dramas of the previous movement. The luscious, singing slow movement settles the mood finally - so we think. Despite the lyrical and expressive nature of this movement, there's still inner turmoil in the middle section which hints at a simmering tension that will ultimately culminate in the Finale. The last movement is dance-like and wrought with tense outbursts. We feel Brahms playing with cross rhythms, hemiolas and changing meters, and eventually the work reaches a warm major-key ending which somehow fails to completely banish the tragic passion and drama that is at the trio's heart.

-Monique Lapins

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