

weinberg
penderecki
schnittke

audite



trio lirico

MIECZYŚLAW WEINBERG (1919-1996)

String Trio, Op. 48

I. *Allegro con moto – Moderato – Allegretto con moto* 6:25

II. *Andante* 4:39

III. *Moderato assai* 4:16

KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI (*1933)

String Trio

I. *Allegro molto* 8:02

II. *Vivace* 5:40

ALFRED SCHNITTKE (1934-1998)

String Trio

I. *Moderato* 14:00

II. *Adagio* 11:51



Music of the heart

The Trio Lirico has programmed three composers who lived and worked on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain until 1989: for Franziska Pietsch and Sophia Reuter this is music which – paraphrasing Goethe – they “search with their souls”. “As children, we both lived in East Berlin and were close friends already then”, Franziska Pietsch, who in the meantime has adopted Cologne as her home city, explains about her violist colleague. “We therefore share personal history, a similar style of playing and a similar non-verbal way of communicating about this music. We just feel it.”

This personal form of perception, into which the Bremen cellist Johannes Krebs blends empathetically, is not irrelevant for this music which becomes accessible not just via the text but also to a high degree via the cultural and political environment in which it was written. Of course Krzysztof Penderecki, following the political liberalisation of Polish music from 1956, had the opportunity to tie in with avant-garde developments in the West and to create his very own and unique modernism. On the other hand, his generational colleague Alfred Schnittke and the older Mieczysław Weinberg had to assert their music in the face of massive harassment from the authorities which, in Weinberg’s case, went as far as being arrested for anti-Semitic reasons. The fact that this existential pressure did not pass their music, its character and its message without a trace also becomes apparent in their works for the intimate genre of the string trio.

Jewish folk music as a code for resistance

Weinberg was born in Warsaw in 1919, a son of refugees who had survived the tsarist pogrom against the Jewish population of Kishinev (in today’s Republic of Moldova). Until 1939 Weinberg was able to study in the young Republic of Poland, graduating at the Warsaw Conservatoire as a pianist, but then, at the beginning of World War II, his Jewish heritage caught up with him once again. Whilst his parents and sisters were killed, he managed to flee via Minsk, where he went on to study composition, and from there to the remote city of Tashkent. After Dmitri Shostakovich had shown an interest in his works, Weinberg relocated to Moscow in 1943, where he would spend the remaining fifty-three years of his life. Both in the East and in the West, the overpowering figure of Shostakovich resulted in Weinberg, until his death in 1996, remaining in the shadow of the more famous composer: his music – seven operas, numerous symphonies, concertos and seventeen string quartets – had not even been printed in its entirety. It was thanks to the violinist Gidon Kremer and other enthusiasts who dedicated themselves to researching forgotten Soviet music that Weinberg’s oeuvre was rediscovered – including the opera *The Passenger*, based on the novel by the Auschwitz survivor Zofia Posmysz, a nightmarish analysis of the horrors of the concentration camps and the sufferings of the survivors.

The friendship between Shostakovich and Weinberg led to a close artistic exchange from the 1940s. They discussed each other’s scores: their mutual suggestions and stimuli become noticeable in the works of both composers. Weinberg, first and foremost, introduced his colleague to Jewish folk music, which Shostakovich then employed – in works such as the vocal cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* – as a code for resistance against anti-Semitism in Stalin’s Russia. For Weinberg himself it was the tone and forms of Yiddish and Moldovan folk music, but also the music of the gypsies that represented the backbone of his post-war music. “I believe this Jewish influence to be the most important element in his music”, says Franziska Pietsch, “a form of spider’s web that connects everything. Thus the sad, melancholy sound, which naturally occurs in Eastern European music, carries its own and special nuance: for us, Weinberg is music of the heart.”

The string trio in three movements was written in 1950, two years after Weinberg, along with many other composers, had been accused by the authorities of harbouring “bourgeois” and “formalist” tendencies. Against this background, it seems an especially bold choice of Weinberg to refer to the ostracised Jewish

music tradition in his Op. 48 Trio, evoking the spirit of dance music from the shtetl at the end of the first movement and in the finale. The opening movement, on the other hand, meets the demands of “socialist realism” that music should be understandable and based on folklore – this occurs in the opening theme played by the cello which then dominates the movement. In the andante Weinberg blends the old craft of the fugue with an expressive lament, ending with a tender and ethereal solo played by the violin (the classical instrument of Jewish musicians). The beginning of the final movement is reminiscent of Shostakovich, its continual pounding symbolising at the same time the pulse of life and inescapable fate. As in an improvisation, the tunes and turns of the instruments rise over this, breaking off at the end in an almost resigned fashion.

Improvisation à 3

“If one has been composing for as many years as I have, one acquires a steady hand.” Krzysztof Penderecki’s summary of his artistic approach, uttered when he was eighty years old, is very apt. A steady hand – this refers to his confident craftsmanship, the sense of continuing great traditions and an understanding of the impact and requirements of each genre. But it also denotes the courage to develop unusual solutions and new narratives, as can be observed in the string trio which Franziska Pietsch perceives as a strong contrast to the trios by Weinberg and Schnittke. “Penderecki does something highly exceptional: he allows all three instruments to appear as soloists, each one in its own way. The violin is very virtuosic, the viola is allowed to lament and the cello is capricious, and yet all come together in the end. This comes across as an improvisation: it feels as though everything happens in the moment.”

Pietsch mainly refers to the first movement which opens with several wild (*feroce*) chords from the three instruments in three different keys, stacked on top of each other. This outburst occurs three times – and three times it is followed by solo cadenzas for each of the instruments. The viola moves in highly expressive sighing intervals and grand gestures, the cello follows scherzo-like in jaunty leaps and the violin with breathtaking chords. With that, the three instruments have introduced themselves confidently: there now follows a cautious attempt at a mutual rapprochement. This begins with timid triplets in a subdued pianissimo, continuing as an adagio where the viola develops the theme of its cadenza whilst the other two instruments join in sensitively. Once again the triplets scurry past, then all players become highly emotional until another adagio leads to a dialogue and an exchange of motifs.

When Penderecki completed his trio in 1991, dedicating it to the Deutsches Streichtrio, his career as a composer had already run an unusual course. He was born in Dębica, to the east of Krakow, in 1933. “Therefore I have, of course, vivid memories of the war. One uncle was murdered in Katyn, another was a member of the resistance and was shot by the Germans in Warsaw. In fact, all men in my family were very engaged politically: at home we were always discussing the current situation.” This political awareness, paired with Polish Catholicism, runs through Penderecki’s oeuvre: from his *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* for strings, the cries of the maltreated creature in his *St Luke Passion*, through to the emotively romantic tone of the *Polish Requiem* and the psalm setting *Domine, quid multiplicati sunt* (2015), written for the anniversary of the Armenian genocide (Penderecki’s grandmother had Armenian roots).

Apart from choral works and dramatic symphonies, Penderecki also composed numerous concertos and a sizeable body of chamber music, including four string quartets. For his trio, he turned to Béla Bartók as his model, which becomes especially noticeable in the second movement. A long circling solo of the viola in a tone somewhere between Bartók and Shostakovich opens a fugue whose progression is sprinkled with motifs from the first movement. After the solo escapades of the trio’s opening, the three instruments are now pressed into the tight corset of relentless mechanics which towards the end seems almost overpowering. This could be interpreted as a reminiscence of the authoritarian structures which Weinberg and Schnittke too had been made to suffer.

Poisoned birthday greeting

As with Penderecki, the Second World War was also a formative childhood experience for Alfred Schnittke, who was one year Penderecki's junior. Schnittke was born in 1934 in Engels, the capital of the "Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic", which was dissolved by Stalin following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Schnittke's mother was a Volga German and a Catholic, his father the son of Jewish-Latvian parents from Frankfurt am Main. Shortly after the war, the family moved to Vienna for three years, where Schnittke's father worked as a journalist and translator for the Soviet occupying power; Schnittke later entered the Moscow Conservatoire as a student and went on to teach instrumentation until 1972. He established contact with the Western avant-garde as early as the mid-1960s which was tantamount to provocation. Performances of his works were repeatedly sabotaged by the authorities until Schnittke finally emigrated to Hamburg in 1990, taking on a professorship at the Musikhochschule; following four strokes, he died in 1998 at the age of sixty-three.

"I am no Russian although Russian is my mother tongue", the composer recapitulated, "but my actual mother tongue was the half-forgotten German of the Volga Germans. And then I had the problem that I am half Jewish. I therefore belong to nobody – neither to the Russians, nor to the Germans, of any kind, nor to the Jews. I have no country, I have no place." This rootlessness also seems to become apparent in Schnittke's music, which carries not one but many thumb-prints. What Schnittke referred to as "poly-stylistic" is a network of quotations and allusions, playing subtly with known patterns from the past and present, a polyphony of meanings and commentaries within one work.

"This music, as magnificent as it is, also has a certain coldness to it, something frightening", Franziska Pietsch remarks about the string trio which Schnittke composed in 1985 – a commission by the Alban Berg Foundation on the occasion of the centenary of Berg's birthday. "The trio begins with a variant of *Happy Birthday*, although what follows is no happy serenade but music without mercy. For me, this clearly is an analysis of death." And indeed, the ailing composer suffered a severe stroke on a hot day in July 1985, only weeks after the premiere of the trio. Declared clinically dead several times, he slowly recovered and then embarked on a veritable frenzy of creative activity.

It is not just these circumstances surrounding the genesis of the work but also the music of the trio which cause the listener's chuckle at the naïve "Happy Birthday" motif to disappear rather swiftly. This motto keeps reappearing, in different hues, at crucial points throughout the work – at times flaring up, at times resigning, at times in a conciliatory major tonality, in the manner of a quotation of Franz Schubert. But Schnittke also presents further themes, which determine both the first and second movements, combining them into a great form: a viola theme with a grand, lamenting gesture, furiously hurled out tutti chords reminiscent of his American colleague Steve Reich, and several pallid chorale chords in the manner of Schubert's song *Death and the Maiden*. With this material, Schnittke produces extremely abrupt changes in mood; even within the most beautiful idyll one cannot be safe from sudden stormy gusts and musical doomsdays – and vice versa. The second movement, an adagio, transforms the "Happy Birthday" motif into a sallow funeral train, grounded by an insistent, long D. At the end, the birthday motto makes a final appearance until it gradually dissolves in the highest register of the violin, like a sensation becoming increasingly blurry.

For the Trio Lirico, Schnittke's work is the linchpin of this Russian-Polish programme. "For us interpreters", the violinist stresses, "it represents, of course, a particular challenge. In order to convey the message, the three of us have to enter a particular zone where we produce an extremely focussed and concentrated energy. And when we succeed, there is also a heightened sense of energy amongst the audience."

TRIO LIRICO

Since its launch in 2014, the Trio Lirico – comprising the violinist **Franziska Pietsch** alongside her congenial partners **Sophia Reuter** (viola) and **Johannes Krebs** (cello) – has become firmly established in the concert world.

The three members of the *Trio Lirico* are brought together by their passion for chamber music; in addition, all three also enjoy solo careers. It is this soloistic influence within a chamber music formation that constitutes the ensemble's trademark: the chamber music dialogue is conducted with soloistic passion, three characterful personalities communicating on a par with each other, maintaining their individuality whilst also fostering the ensemble's homogeneity. The result is a unique combination of enthusiastic and spirited music-making and attractive suspense, as well as a richly nuanced, soulful string sound and a successful blend of stylistic faithfulness and a personal interpretational approach: all this enabled the *Trio Lirico* to establish itself on the concert scene soon after being founded. The ensemble's varied repertoire ranges from classicism through to contemporary music; integrating string duos into their concert programmes provides added interest.

On the occasion of the centenary of Max Reger's death, the *Trio Lirico* recorded its debut album (audite), which has been enthusiastically received by the international music press. Now the ensemble presents a disc featuring works of Schnittke, Weinberg and Penderecki: further releases are planned.





FRANZISKA PIETSCH violin

was born in East Berlin. Aged eleven, she made her debut at the Komische Oper Berlin. She began her studies at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin. In 1986, she was able to enter West Germany where she continued her studies with Ulf Hoelscher, Jens Ellermann and Dorothy DeLay; masterclasses rounded off her musical training. Franziska Pietsch has won numerous national and international competitions. Her busy concert schedule has taken her across Europe, as well as to America and Asia. She has held several posts as concertmaster.

Since 2017, Franziska Pietsch has increasingly been dedicating herself to her solo career, presenting a much praised recording of the Prokofiev violin concertos (Cristian Măcelaru, DSO Berlin) as well as an album of solo works by Bartók, Ysaÿe and Prokofiev. In spring 2019 she presented her first disc with her new partner at the piano, Josu De Solaun.

Franziska Pietsch plays a violin by Carlo Antonio Testore (Milan) of 1751.

**SOPHIA REUTER** viola

was born in Dresden. She studied violin with Klaus Hertel at the Hochschule für Musik Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in Leipzig, with Peter Tietze in Berlin and with Yehudi Menuhin and Alberto Lysy at the International Menuhin Music Academy Gstaad, Switzerland. Later in her career, she went on to teach viola and chamber music at the same establishment. She honed her viola technique with Alfred Lipka at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin. Sophia Reuter has performed as a soloist with many renowned orchestras.

In 2018 she became a member of the Staatskapelle Berlin. She regularly gives masterclasses and is a popular guest lecturer in Germany and abroad: most recently she taught in Bangkok and lectured at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam.

Her viola was made by the Erfurt luthier Wilhelm Brückner.

**JOHANNES KREBS** cello

studied cello and chamber music in Hanover, Madrid, Basel and Cologne with Frans Helmerson, Friedrich-Jürgen Sellheim, Klaus Heitz and Reinhard Latzko. He also took part in masterclasses given by renowned artists including Boris Pergamenschikow, Bernhard Greenhouse, Menahem Pressler and Yehudi Menuhin. Numerous prizes from national and international competitions paved his way into international concert halls.

In 2006 Johannes Krebs was engaged as principal cello of the Bremer Philharmoniker. In 2015 he became artistic director of the Musikfestspiele Goslar.

He teaches at the Hochschule für Künste Bremen and gives masterclasses in Germany, Poland, Italy and Spain.

He plays a cello by Carlo Antonio Testore (Milan) of 1746.

audite

recording: November 5 - 7, 2018
recording location: Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem
recording / executive producer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff
engineer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer
editing: Dipl.-Tonmeister Simon Böckenhoff
photos: Felix Broede
art direction and design: AB-Design, Detmold

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