



Musica Viva Australia



Z.E.N. TRIO



Wesfarmers Arts

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THE IMPOSSIBLE
POSSIBLE

Paul Kildea, Artistic Director



Musica Viva Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the many lands on which we meet, work and live. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present – people who have sung their songs, danced their dances and told their stories on these lands for thousands of generations, and who continue to do so.

Z.E.N. TRIO

ESTHER YOO

Violin

NAREK HAKHNAZARYAN

Cello

ZHANG ZUO

Piano

ADELAIDE

Adelaide Town Hall

Thursday 25 August, 7.30pm

- Pre-concert talk: 6:45pm,
Prince Alfred Room
- Meet the Artists after the concert

NEWCASTLE

Newcastle City Hall

Saturday 27 August, 7.30pm

- Pre-concert talk: 6:45pm,
Mulubinba Room
- Meet the Artists after the concert

CANBERRA

Llewellyn Hall,
ANU School of Music

Thursday 18 August, 7pm

- Pre-concert talk: 6:15pm,
Larry Sitsky Room

PERTH

Perth Concert Hall

Recorded for broadcast by ABC Classic

Monday 15 August, 7.30pm

- Pre-concert talk: 6:45pm,
Corner Stage Riverside, Terrace Level

MELBOURNE

Elisabeth Murdoch Hall,
Melbourne Recital Centre

Saturday 13 August, 7pm

- Pre-concert talk: 6:15pm,
Salzer Suite, Level 2
- Meet the Artists after the concert

Tuesday 23 August, 7pm

This concert will be livestreamed

- Pre-concert talk: 6:15pm,
Salzer Suite, Level 2

SYDNEY

City Recital Hall

Saturday 20 August, 2pm

- Pre-concert talk, 1:15pm,
Function Room
- Meet the Artists after the concert

Monday 22 August, 7pm

Charles Berg Tribute Concert

- Pre-concert talk, 6:15pm,
Function Room
- CD Signing after the concert

With special thanks to the Australian Music Foundation for their support of this tour,
and to the Producers' Circle and Amadeus Society for their support of the 2022 Concert Season.

Cover photo: Copyright Gary Heery

PROGRAM 1

Canberra	Thu 18 August, 7pm
Sydney	Sat 20 August, 2pm
Melbourne	Tue 23 August, 7pm
Adelaide	Thu 25 August, 7:30pm

Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897)

Piano Trio No. 1 in B Major, Op. 8 (Revised version, 1889)

35 min

- I *Allegro con brio* (Fast and spirited) – *Tranquillo* (Calmly) –
In tempo ma sempre sostenuto (In time but always sustained)
- II *Scherzo: Allegro molto* (Very fast) – *Meno allegro* (Less fast) –
Tempo primo (At the original tempo)
- III *Adagio* (Slow)
- IV *Finale: Allegro* (Fast)

INTERVAL

Matthew LAING (b 1988)

Little Cataclysms (2022)

12 min

Commissioned for Musica Viva Australia by Graham Lovelock and Steven Singer
World premiere performances

Arno BABAJANIAN (1921–1983)

Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello in F-Sharp Minor (1952)

24 min

- I *Largo* (Slow and broad) – *Allegro espressivo* (Fast and expressive)
- II *Andante* (Moving along at an easy walking pace)
- III *Allegro vivace* (Fast and lively)

REGIONAL TOURING

The Z.E.N. Trio will perform at the Macquarie Conservatorium in Dubbo, NSW on Wednesday 10 August and in Hobart Town Hall, Tasmania on Friday 12 August as part of Musica Viva Australia's Regional Touring Program.

For further details visit:
musicaviva.com.au/regional

PROGRAM 2

Melbourne	Sat 13 August, 7pm
Perth	Mon 15 August, 7:30pm
Sydney	Mon 22 August, 7pm
Newcastle	Sat 27 August, 7:30pm

Arno BABAJANIAN (1921–1983)

Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello in F-Sharp Minor (1952) 24 min

- I *Largo* (Slow and broad) – *Allegro espressivo* (Fast and expressive)
- II *Andante* (Moving along at an easy walking pace)
- III *Allegro vivace* (Fast and lively)

Matthew LAING (b 1988)

Little Cataclysms (2022) 12 min

Commissioned for Musica Viva Australia by Graham Lovelock and Steven Singer
World premiere performances

INTERVAL

Antonín DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 90 'Dumky' (1891) 32 min

- I *Lento maestoso* (Slow and majestic) – *Allegro vivace* (Fast and lively)
- II *Poco adagio* (A little slow)
- III *Andante* (Moving along at an easy walking pace)
- IV *Andante moderato* (Moving along at a moderate pace)
- V *Allegro* (Fast)
- VI *Lento maestoso* (Slow and majestic) – *Vivace* (Lively)

MASTERCLASSES

The Z.E.N. Trio will present the following masterclasses as part of this tour:

- Dubbo: Tue 9 August (Zee Zee)
Macquarie Conservatorium
- Perth: Wed 17 August (Narek)
University of Western Australia, Callaway Auditorium
- Sydney: Mon 22 August (Narek)
Conservatorium of Music

Musica Viva Australia's Masterclass program is supported by:

Nicholas Callinan AO & Elizabeth Callinan
Caroline & Robert Clemente
Ian & Caroline Frazer
The Patricia H Reid Endowment Fund
Andrew Sisson AO & Tracey Sisson
Mick & Margaret Toller
Anonymous (1)

For further details visit: musicaviva.com.au/masterclasses

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



One of the most inspiring aspects of working with young musicians is watching them shift from learning their instruments and craft, to them realising that they have an implicit responsibility to repertory from the last 400 years or more. (Of course, Indigenous musical traditions in this country go back many more thousands of years.) Thus it was with the members of the Z.E.N. Trio, who met as soloists on the BBC's prestigious New Generation scheme before recognising that their compatibility and love of the piano trio repertory made them such natural collaborators.

Solo repertory requires a different performance psychology, whether in concerto or in recital; the economy of the former allows so little time for meaningful collaboration, while the latter frequently places the spotlight on the soloist alone, despite the distinguished associate artist up there on stage. Chamber repertory demands an entirely equal partnership, a different way of rehearsing, and often different performance venues too. My favourite musicians are those who can do all three with equal assuredness, which is what makes these three artists – Zee Zee, Esther and Narek – so compelling in this great trio repertory.

There is a fourth. Matthew Laing – a lovely violist in his own right – is fast emerging as one of the most thoughtful and vibrant compositional voices in Australia today. Haydn wrote piano trios, though it took Mozart to balance the voices and establish a template for the genre into the 19th century and beyond. Asked to add to this genre, Matthew has responded with a work of great complexity, colour and virtuosity, which receives its premiere on this tour thanks, in part, to the generosity of the commissioners, Graham Lovelock and Steven Singer.

Paul Kildea

Artistic Director
Musica Viva Australia

MEET THE ARTISTS

ESTHER YOO

In an era when technical perfection is a given, the spotlight inevitably shifts to interpretation, and Esther Yoo's playing has been described as 'mesmerising', 'soulful', 'spellbinding', 'intensely lyrical', and 'taking her audience into an enchanted garden'. She performs with leading conductors – including Vladimir Ashkenazy (with whom she and the Philharmonia Orchestra recorded the Sibelius, Glazunov and Tchaikovsky concertos for Deutsche Grammophon), Gustavo Dudamel, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Thierry Fischer, Karina Canellakis and Andrew Davis – and orchestras such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra appointed her as their inaugural Artist-in-Residence in 2018.



Esther has appeared in recital at the Lincoln Center and Wigmore Hall, and in 2018 featured prominently on the soundtrack and accompanying Decca soundtrack recording of the feature film *On Chesil Beach*. She has also performed at a range of prominent festivals including the BBC Proms and Aspen Music Festival. The piano trio Z.E.N. (which she co-founded with fellow former BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists Zhang Zuo and Narek Hakhnazaryan) tours widely in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia.

Esther may be unique among classical soloists in being fully tri-cultural. She was born and spent her earliest years in the US, before receiving her education in Belgium and Germany, but she always retained her family's proud Korean heritage. Having authentic roots in three continents may have contributed to her versatility and exceptionally broad range of expression, and was unquestionably a factor in making her one of the most articulate and gifted communicators in the field of classical music.

She began playing the violin at four, and made her concerto debut aged eight. At 16 she became the youngest prize-winner of the International Sibelius Violin Competition and two years later, in 2012, she was one of the youngest ever prizewinners of the Queen Elisabeth Competition. In 2014 she became a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist and in 2018 Classic FM featured her in their Top 30 Artists under 30.

NAREK HAKHNAZARYAN

Since winning the Cello First Prize and Gold Medal at the XIV International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2011 at the age of 22, Narek Hakhnazaryan has performed with most major orchestras and in recital and chamber music across the globe. He has been praised as 'dazzlingly brilliant' (*The Strad*) and 'nothing short of magnificent' (*San Francisco Chronicle*); of his Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra debut, the *LA Times* described his command of the instrument as 'extraordinary.'

He has appeared with orchestras such as the London, Chicago, Pittsburgh and Sydney Symphony Orchestras, the London, Rotterdam, Czech, Seoul, LA and Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestras, Tokyo's NHK Symphony, the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre de Paris. A former BBC New Generation Artist, he has performed with all the BBC orchestras and at the BBC Proms. In 2017 the Vienna Konzerthaus invited Narek

onto their Great Talent program; during the two seasons that followed he performed there regularly in recital, chamber music and with orchestra, most notably with the Vienna Symphony. He was the 2020/21 Artist in Residence at the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Recent recital highlights include performances with Daniil Trifonov at the Verbier and Rheingau Festivals, concerts at Carnegie Hall and Boston's Jordan Hall, a four-concert residency at London's Wigmore Hall, and a tour of SE Asia performing the complete Bach solo cello suites.

Mentored by the late Rostropovich, in 2011 Narek received an Artist Diploma from the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Lawrence Lesser. Prior to this he studied at the Moscow Conservatory and at the Sayat-Nova School of Music in Yerevan, Armenia. He was the First Prize winner in the 2006 Aram Khachaturian International Competition and the 2008 Young Concert Artists International Auditions.

Born in Yerevan into a family of musicians, Narek performs regularly with his brother, the conductor Tigran Akhnazarian. In 2017 he was awarded the title of 'Honoured Artist of Armenia'. He plays the 1707 Joseph Guarneri cello with bows by François Xavier Tourte and Benoît Rolland.



ZHANG ZUO

An imaginative and electrifying performer, Zhang 'Zee Zee' Zuo is unique among the young generation of pianists. Her interpretations have been praised as 'taking us to another reality... bright, expressive and moving to the extreme' (Belgian Broadcasting), while her creative maturity has been hailed as 'a powerful, passionate and compelling representation of pure artistry' (Los Angeles Times).

Recent highlights include concerts with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, the China and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestras and the Philharmonia Orchestra, as well as the complete piano concertos of Beethoven and Saint-Saëns with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. She has also appeared with the BBC Symphony and BBC Philharmonic Orchestras, the London, Warsaw, Los Angeles and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestras, the San Francisco, Minnesota, Cincinnati and Seattle Symphony Orchestras, Belgian National Orchestra, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich and Tokyo's NHK Symphony Orchestra, among others.

She has given recitals at Wigmore Hall and the Kennedy and Lincoln Centers, and appeared at Italy's MiTo Festival, the Lucerne Festival, the Aspen Music Festival and the BBC Proms.

Zee Zee was a BBC New Generation Artist from 2013 to 2015.

Zee Zee began her musical training in Germany at the age of five. Upon returning to her native China, she became one of the

most sought-after young artists in the nation, collaborating with the leading Chinese orchestras, with whom she retains a close link. Having completed her piano studies at the Shenzhen Arts School, Zee Zee was invited to continue her artistic development at the Eastman School of Music and the Juilliard School, where she won the coveted Petschek Piano Award. She has studied at the Peabody Institute and continues to receive guidance from Alfred Brendel.

Zee Zee was the winner of China's first International Piano Concerto Competition, the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition and the Krainev International Piano Competition, and a prize-winner at the 2013 Queen Elisabeth Competition. Her first album, Ravel's Piano Concerto in G and Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 2 with Paavo Järvi and the Philharmonia Orchestra, was released in 2019; a solo album, *Journey*, featuring works by Wagner, Schoenberg and Liszt, was released in May this year.

MATTHEW LAING

Matthew Laing is a freelance composer and viola player currently based in Melbourne, Australia. His music, described as 'thought provoking and unusually beautiful', is fundamentally driven by an interest in storytelling through sound, typically around themes of social connection and environment.

Matthew has been writing music since he started university, sketching ideas whilst training to be a viola player, and completing a Bachelor of Music/Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Melbourne. Following a successful participation in the Flinders Quartet's 2017 composer workshop, his first big commission, *Out of Hibernation*, was premiered by the Quartet in 2019; this led to an Ian Potter Cultural Trust grant to work on the quartet with mentoring from Brett Dean in London and Berlin.

Having participated in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's 2020 Young Composer program, he was selected as the orchestra's Young Composer in Residence for 2021, culminating in the premiere of his bassoon concerto *Of Paradise Lost* in July 2022. Matthew was a recipient of a 2021 Prelude

Residency through the Peggy Glanville-Hicks Composer House Trust, and is a Musica Viva Australia FutureMaker for 2021–23.

His work *Portrait of Blood*, for string quartet and mezzo-soprano, was performed in London on a tour by Affinity Quartet and Lotte Betts-Dean in February 2020. Other compositional engagements have included works for the Australian String Quartet, the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Chamber Players, Wattleseed Ensemble and ANAM.



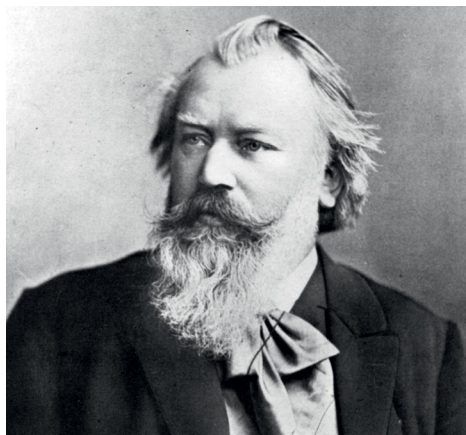
FURTHER EXPLORATION

The Z.E.N. Trio has released two albums on the Deutsche Grammophon label. The first, *Brahms & Dvořák Piano Trios*, released in 2017, features sparkling recordings of Brahms' Piano Trio No. 1 and Dvořák's 'Dumky' Piano Trio, Op. 90. *Burning Through the Cold*, released in 2020, features piano trios by Babajanian and Shostakovich as well as arrangements by the Trio of works by Khachaturian and Rachmaninoff. The Z.E.N. Trio's discography can be found on their website: zen-trio.com

Matthew Laing's music has been performed by artists including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Flinders Quartet, Katie Yap and Lily Bryant. Videos and audio recordings can be found on his website: mattlaing.com

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Brahms's B Major Piano Trio is, paradoxically, a product of both his youth and his maturity. He first sketched it out in 1853, and it was among the draft works which the 20-year-old composer showed to Schumann when the two met in September that year. It was published as Brahms's Opus 8 in 1854. However, over 30 years later in 1889, with the prospect of another edition of the work going to press, Brahms thoroughly revised and altered it. Among the many changes were drastic cuts to all but the principal thematic material in the first and last movements; the re-working of entire sections in the central part of the slow movement; and further cuts to the development section and the omission of a fugal episode in the first movement. If something of the work's rambling, youthful Romanticism was lost in the process, along with over a third of its considerable length, the new version (which is the one generally in use today) certainly gained a clearer formal logic. In its new guise, it loses nothing in comparison with the Clarinet Trio which Brahms wrote only two years after the revision, in 1891.



Despite the shortened treatment of subsequent themes, some 40 bars are spent over the statement of the first movement's broad principal theme. Like Schubert in his later instrumental works, the young Brahms often

chose to open his works with spacious, lyrical themes. These, though beautiful in themselves, do not always contain the pithy motifs needed for tight, concentrated musical argument, and thus applied to sonata forms inevitably gave rise to long, leisurely movements. In this case, however, potential longueurs are cast out by the sheer verve and enthusiasm of the music, by a combination of soaring melodies and ebullient pianism, plainly tailored to Brahms's own arresting pianistic style. Time after time, the trio conjures up visions of the burly young virtuoso, his arms flung wide to the extremes of the keyboard, revelling in the increasingly powerful sonorities of the still-evolving pianoforte.

Even in this early work, many other hallmarks of the mature Brahmsian style are present: the energetic Gypsy (Romá)-like rhythms; the sonorous effect of melodies doubled in thirds and sixths; a fascination with falling thirds; and a unique attraction to the lowest registers of the keyboard. Brahms also reveals a tendency to darken the mood towards the end of a work. As early as the *Scherzo*, the work leaves B major for B minor, alternating with B major for the movement's trio section and then for the slow movement, but finding itself caught up inextricably in the tonic minor for the finale.

Returning to the second movement, we find Brahms's first thoughts virtually unchanged by the 1889 revision, and the young composer's nationalistic fascination with German folk culture is still sung to the full in the opening hunting horn motif. This scrap of rustic melody is curiously reminiscent, albeit through the filter of a minor key, of the scherzo theme from Schubert's *Octet*; but (written in 1853) it also points forward, inevitably, to the finale of Brahms's *Horn Trio* of 1868.

Another 'ghost', that of Beethoven, is conjured up in the hymn-like piano writing at the opening of the *Adagio*, with full chords simultaneously high and low in the piano's register. Moving further into the movement, the polished surface of the middle sections gives no hint of the extensive revisions

performed upon them, although the finely wrought chromaticism does perhaps reveal the defter touch of the older Brahms. In contrast, the opening of the B minor *Finale* sounds very much like the young Brahms's attempt, in its impetuous, lightly accompanied cello melody, to pay homage to the much-admired Schumann (remember, it was drafted just before the two first met). But here too, it doesn't take long for the younger composer's vigour to assert itself, and the final pages are entirely Brahmsian.

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Matthew Laing writes:

Little Cataclysms plays on the idea of scale and proportion, and a little bit on the melodrama typical of Romantic-era works, when the piano trio probably had its greatest era. Piano trios naturally lend themselves to large-scale works, so I wanted to try and recreate that, just in small timeframes, hence the paradox '*Little Cataclysms*'.

Each of these five pieces was initially inspired by a line from a song or poem, but I've left these out of the piece, in part because they're

a bit dark, but also because I don't want the piece to be too prescriptive. *Little Cataclysms* is about intimate, personal disasters in miniature form – like a deep-seeded memory awoken, reimagined changed or unchanged, then gone, where the reimagining informs the memory in the silence that follows.

© MATTHEW LAING 2022

Little Cataclysms was commissioned for Musica Viva Australia by Graham Lovelock and Steven Singer.

Arno Babajanian began his musical studies at seven in a special program for talented children at the Komitas State Conservatory in Yerevan. His playing soon caught the ear of his more famous compatriot, Aram Khachaturian, who recommended he go to Moscow to study piano and composition. His study was interrupted by five years of war, but in 1946 he returned to Moscow, and in 1950 he won a prestigious Stalin Prize for his *Heroic Ballad* for Piano and Orchestra. This was it, the official stamp of approval, prompting Dmitri Shostakovich to write, 'Arno Babajanian is a great musician gifted with compositional talent.'

You can hear a heady mixture of musical influences in his Piano Trio: the emotional rush and spectacular pianism of Rachmaninoff, the timbral colours of Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov, and the directness of Shostakovich. But in spite of his immersion in the Soviet school of composition, Babajanian's Armenian identity is at the heart of his music. His long, yearning melodies, which, to an ear used to Western harmony, sound like they are wandering far from home, and his use of cross-rhythms and rapidly changing time signatures are all part of a rich tradition.

Bartók and Kodály are often cited as the first ethnomusicologists, collecting and transcribing traditional Bulgarian and Romani songs at the start of the 20th century. But a decade before

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Bartók there was Komitas, an Armenian priest and musicologist, collecting and transcribing Armenian folk songs and Kurdish melodies. His work was cut short by the genocide inflicted on Armenia by the Ottoman Empire in 1915, but his legacy as founder of the Armenian national school of music lives on.

The Piano Trio in F-Sharp Minor, written in 1952, is shot through with melodies derived from the traditional folk songs at the heart of Babajanian's musical upbringing. Sacred chants, love songs, dances and ballads find their way into every corner of the trio, from the opening melody, to the *horovel*, the song of the ploughman, the *antuni*, song of the migrant, to the *kochari* dance.

The first movement opens with violin and cello playing a sombre melody reminiscent of the *sharakan*, the liturgical chant of Armenian Apostolic Church. It has also been identified as the Armenian folk song *Garuna*, or 'Springtime'. The theme reappears at key moments throughout the work in different guises. Here the hushed, introspective mood gives way to the theme becoming a Romantic song, building to a passionate outpouring of emotion.

The second movement opens with an exquisite, searching melody, an *antuni* or migrant's song, played in the top register of the violin, accompanied by gentle, rocking chords in

the piano. The floating calm is disrupted by a more chromatic middle section, interrupted by an emphatic restatement of our old friend, 'Springtime', before the *antuni* returns, in all its fragile beauty.

The third movement leaps into a spirited *kochari*, a men's stomping dance full of tricky cross-rhythms and changes in meter, ready to trip up the unwary. The central section introduces a more sensual mood, although no let up in the headlong pace, before returning to the opening *kochari*, appearing this time as a foot-tangling fugue. It all comes to a juddering halt as Babajanian clears the deck to revisit his opening theme, 'Springtime', rescored in rich harmony, before a final dance to the end.

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In 1891 **Antonín Dvořák** was riding a wave of international acclaim. He toured to Britain and Russia for performances of his Eighth Symphony and Requiem. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University, and invited to take up the directorship of the newly established American Conservatory of Music in New York.

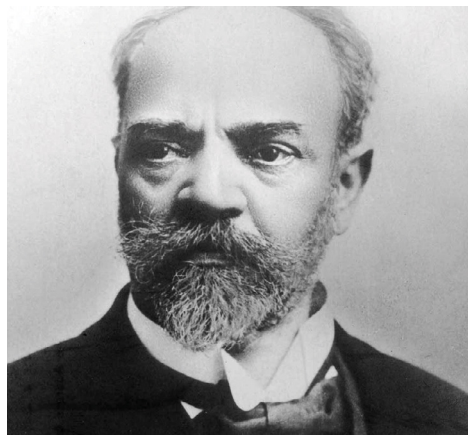
On 11 April of that same year, on the occasion of his accepting another honorary doctorate, this time from Prague's Charles University, he gave the premiere of his Fourth Piano Trio, the 'Dumky', alongside violinist Ferdinand Lachner and cellist Hanuš Wihan.

In a letter to his friend Alois Göbl, Dvořák described the work as 'a little piece for violin, cello and piano. It will be both happy and sad. In some places it will be like a melancholic song, elsewhere like a merry dance; but, all told, the style will be lighter or, if I might put it another way, more popular, in short, so that it will appeal to both higher and lower echelons.'

It was, as he hoped, an instant hit. The composer went on to perform the work more than forty times on his farewell tour of Moravia



and Bohemia, before leaving to take up his new post in America. But whatever Dvořák's stated intentions, the 'Dumky' Trio is far from 'little'. From the high drama of the opening, to the frantic skitter of the finale, it is an unconventional and expansive patchwork of melodies: a substantial farewell gift from an artist allowing himself a moment's break from the never-ending pressure to prove himself.



So what is a *dumky*? Or, rather, a *dumka*, the singular version of the word? *Dumka* comes from the Ukrainian word for 'thought' or 'notion'. It also refers to the *dumy*, an epic ballad, often the lament of exiles or oppressed peoples, sung by wandering troubadours and Slavic story-tellers. The term turns up in works by Tchaikovsky, Janáček, Chopin, Liszt and many others, and has, in the process of classical appropriation, come to mean a work with quick mood changes, from happy to sad, fast to slow, major to minor.

Six *dumky* make up Dvořák's Fourth Piano Trio, the first three played *attacca*, without a break, and the last three played with no more than a quick pause between them. The work overflows with invention, but without formal thematic developments or composerly techniques. Each theme sits neatly, usually in an eight-bar phrase, and no matter how florid or exuberant the accompaniment becomes,

you can almost always hear the tune, intact, in one of the voices. It's particularly clear in the first movement where, after a tempestuous opening flourish, Dvořák's first *dumka*, his first idea, is played by the violin alone, before being picked up by the cello, then, without warning, transformed into an upbeat dance, then back to the drama of the opening. Four seasons in a day.

The second *dumka*, marked *Poco adagio*, is an elegiac melody which slips from minor to major, and from nostalgia to agitation. The third, marked *Andante*, is sung by the piano, alone, before being passed to the cello, a little faster, and then the violin, in a new key.

It's not so much a series of variations as a series of experiments: what would this idea sound like if we went faster? Slower? In a higher register? It's like a playground for sound, but all clearly relating back to the initial, humble idea.

Dumka no. 4 is a rangy melody overlaid by an uneasy *perpetuo moto* (perpetual motion), while the fifth *dumka* has a scherzo-esque mood. The sixth has all the emotions of an opera in miniature, from its torrid opening, to a tender love song, to the triumphant close.

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INTERVIEW

BY STEPHANIE ESLAKE

Z.E.N. Trio is an international ensemble in the truest sense of the term: its pianist Zhang Zuo (Zee Zee) lives in Germany and Hong Kong, violinist Esther Yoo in South Korea and the USA, and cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan in Armenia. Rare is the opportunity for these players to meet and rehearse in the same country. Yet when asked what holds them together despite the distances, their answer is surprisingly simple: 'Love.'

Zee Zee's statement speaks not only to their passion for chamber music, but the way their work is bound by friendship. In coming together for their Musica Viva Australia tour, Z.E.N. defies the boundaries of time and location – navigating online communication, infrequent rehearsals, and pandemic restrictions – to honour the role of music in their professional and personal lives.

'Regardless of how little or how much time has elapsed in between our meetings, we are always able to pick up right where we left off,' Esther shares. 'It is quite easy for us to talk for hours, so we have to keep track of time – especially in rehearsals!'

While the musicians can catch up in the digital world, they restrict their rehearsals to the physical – and this means that when they finally come together, they make the most of it. But Zee Zee confesses the trio will carve out time to visit restaurants, go shopping, and watch movies together. They also make a special effort to attend each other's solo concerts; each member of Z.E.N. is a virtuosic soloist in their own right.

Their way of life – supporting individual success while valuing togetherness – is reflected in the trio's name. Z.E.N. is an acronym formed with an initial from each artist, and a philosophical statement about their performance style.

'In all aspects, chamber music is a time for us to put our own egos aside, listen to each other, and always put the music first,' Esther says. 'This idea is essential in chamber music – both in the manner of approaching chamber music but also in the more practical ways of communication and teamwork.'

Such sincerity may be one reason behind the trio's popularity. It's a global success story that's woven into their MVA program: the players will perform music by Brahms, Babajanian, and Dvořák, much of which they have recorded with Deutsche Grammophon.

'Each piece holds a special place in our hearts, and brings back memories of touring and recording,' Esther says.

The Brahms trio (Program 1) was the first piece they performed when they met through the BBC New Generation Artist scheme. The Babajanian trio (Program 2) is an Armenian work that Narek brought to the ensemble.

'We were immediately blown away by the brilliance and beauty of this work, and we are always happy to introduce this piece to audiences around the world,' Esther says of the Babajanian.

The tour also paves the way for another big achievement: it will be the first time Z.E.N. has premiered a piece of contemporary chamber music.

Little Cataclysms was composed by Musica Viva Australia FutureMaker Matt Laing (made possible through a commission by Graham Lovelock and Steven Singer). Zee Zee says the new music delivers high-impact 'drama, intimacy, and emotions'.



'Love'

'I'm grateful to have this opportunity to explore new ways of learning and expressing music. It has been challenging but rewarding!' Zee Zee says.

It might be cheeky to suggest the challenge was intentional – but the composer does acknowledge one thing: he didn't go easy on the players. And that's because he knew what they would be capable of.

'I felt I had great freedom to write whatever came to mind. It's made the piece quite demanding – but I know they'll do a great job of it!' Matt says. The result is a collection of five small pieces that capture the grand scale of traditional piano trio repertoire.

'I like to think the piece plays to that Romantic aesthetic the Z.E.N.s do so well, but with a more contemporary harmonic language,' the composer explains.

Matt develops his musical voice through the prestigious FutureMaker initiative, which has nurtured outstanding early career artists, from pianist Aura Go to chamber ensemble Arcadia Winds among others. Matt – who also performs as a freelance viola with Australia's top ensembles and orchestras – says the commissioning of local music is 'absolutely critical to the continuation of our art form'.

'It acts as a reflection of our time, and contextualises more traditional repertoire,' he says. 'Trusting in composers and creatives with new ideas and concepts opens us up to new possibilities around what a work might be, which I think is really exciting... That Musica Viva Australia is so mobile and has a uniquely national profile makes it the perfect organisation to lead in this space.'

Esther too finds an 'exhilarating sense of freedom' in working with music we are all yet to hear.

'Matt has been very supportive and open to discussions with us,' she says of the collaboration. 'We have all been enthusiastic about working with each other since the idea of incorporating a new commission piece into the tour was first brought up.'

Esther, Zee Zee, and Narek have crossed many borders to perform this music on Australian stages – and it will be the first time the friends have come together since 2019, when the pandemic began to take hold.

'It will be a very significant moment for us,' Esther says. 'We are so excited to be a part of Musica Viva's season, and grateful for the opportunity to tour all across Australia.'



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Musica Viva Australia's Amadeus Society is a small philanthropic circle of passionate music lovers who help us to realise our bold artistic vision and bring acclaimed international and local artists to our stages throughout the country.

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Annual membership of the Society includes intimate private house concerts with our mainstage artists, currently held in Melbourne and Sydney.

If you are interested in joining the Amadeus Society or would like more information please contact:

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KEVIN'S JOURNEY TO APY LANDS

Kevin Tuck is a Musica Viva Australia artist, part of the ensemble Rhythm Works, a dynamic percussion duo who perform as part of our Musica Viva Australia In Schools program. Kevin speaks fondly about his career as a musician and what it's like playing for children:

'Playing for kids gives me such great joy, they give great, instant feedback. When you play for adults, they can sort of be very reserved in their feedback. Kids, you know straight away.'

Last year, Kevin was excited to be travelling to Amata in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in northern South Australia, to share music with the children of Amata Anangu School, thanks to the financial support of our donors, the Gardos Family. Amata is a small town with a population of around 455 people, situated 40km south of the Northern Territory border and 110km south of Uluru. With a goal of fostering connection and involving the children in creating new music, Kevin wanted to learn and incorporate the percussive rhythms of Pitjantjatjara words to create fun musical exercises for the children to play on drums, buckets and other percussion. Workshops were held throughout the day with students of all ages, from pre-school to senior year.

The children were nervous but curious when attending the workshops. Kevin worked to build trust through games and fun activities such as body percussion. After working to build the confidence of the participants in the second workshop group of the day, the group taught Kevin his first Pitjantjatjara word – Uwa! meaning 'Yes!' Other words were then suggested by the now excited group of children, and the group decided upon *Ngintaka*, meaning 'goanna'. Drumming rhythms were then composed by the group to represent these words.

After working with four different age groups, the school community came together for a small concert to celebrate the work they had achieved with Kevin throughout the day. The shy but smiling and laughing students performed the rhythms they created together, as well as a few drum solos thrown in for good measure. It was clear that through this new experience, confidence was built over their time with Kevin, who felt moved by the final performance at the end of the day.

'I thought if I can show that being involved with something, doing something and playing some music is a lot of fun, then they're going to come along with me. So that's what I tried to do.'

Thanks to the work of our wonderful Musica Viva Australia In Schools artists like Kevin, and communities like Amata, we can bring experiences to children in many different communities all over Australia such as APY Lands.

Access to these great education programs can be difficult in some parts of Australia, particularly in remote or low socio-economic areas. With the help of those generous donors who give to our Equal Music Fund, children are given subsidised access to these programs and exposure to music at a young age, helping to foster not only a life-long love and engagement with music but also promoting their creativity, self-worth, confidence and joy.

This journey to APY Lands was supported by The Gardos Family and our Equal Music program.

If you would like to be part of this generous group of donors, please get in contact with Caroline Davis, our Individual Giving Manager: cdavis@musicaviva.com.au

Tribute

The concert in Sydney on Monday 22 August commemorates Charles J Berg's contribution to the development of Musica Viva Australia.

CHARLES BERG AM OBE (1917–1988)

In loving memory

No history of Musica Viva Australia could be written without paying tribute to a man whose enthusiasm for chamber music was unbounded, and who worked tenaciously to see it grow and flourish in Australia – the late Charles J Berg AM OBE.

Charles Berg was born in Berlin in 1917, son of an orchestral conductor who was a champion of the works of Richard Strauss and Alban Berg. Charles studied violin, piano and composition, developing a deep love of music from an early age. A growing tide of anti-semitism, however, became an overwhelming influence in his teenage years, and he was forced to leave his studies at the age of 16 to undertake an accountancy apprenticeship in Berlin with a heavy industry firm owned by a Jewish family. It was this that took him to London in 1937, where he became fluent in English.

In September 1937, Charles Berg came to Australia with £200: £50 of his own and £150 borrowed. After a short period in Melbourne he went to Sydney where he decided to stay, selling his beloved violin for £30 to help finance his new life. While working full time he studied accountancy at night, and he established his own accountancy practice in 1945.

On 8 December 1945, Charles attended the first Musica Viva Australia concert at the NSW Conservatorium, never dreaming (he admitted later) that he would be involved with the organisation for so much of his life. Two years later he joined the Committee of the fledgling organisation.

Difficult economic circumstances forced the organisation into recess from 1951 to 1954, in which year Charles and a number of his local colleagues (including Musica Viva Australia's former Patron, the late Kenneth Tribe) each gave £100 as a guarantee against loss to reinstate chamber music presentations by visiting overseas artists. Charles acted as Committee Secretary, keeping a watchful eye on finances as the organisation began to thrive again.

Musica Viva Australia branches were quickly established by enthusiastic volunteers in Melbourne and Adelaide, and the organisation's impressive national network began to grow. It did so under Charles Berg's watchful, often conservative (but never timid) direction. He was President of the Musica Viva Society from 1962.

In 1973, Charles stepped down from his Musica Viva Australia office to take up another arts challenge – the Chairmanship of The Australian Opera (now Opera Australia), which he took up in 1974. He served with great personal commitment in that voluntary capacity for a record 12 years, weathering with grace the often tumultuous upheavals inherent in any artistic organisation's growth to depth and maturity.

Throughout his years at the Opera, and after his retirement as Chairman, Charles continued to exhibit a keen interest in, and concern for, Musica Viva Australia. His death in 1988 was a loss not only to Musica Viva Australia, but to the Australian arts community as a whole.

Charles Berg's son, Tony Berg AM, was Chairman of Musica Viva Australia from 1986 to 1999 and is now the organisation's Patron.



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