

PROGRAMME NOTES



At face value, Brahms's (rightly) cherished first piano trio, Op. 8 in B major, and Tailleferre's piano trio share little in common. Brahms's first, bold attempt to put his mark on the piano trio canon is, as one would expect, lush, rhapsodic and almost symphonic in scale and structure. Throughout its four movements, it expresses, with moving accuracy, many faces of the human experience: tender love, fearful discomfort, uncontrollable despair, heavenly contemplation, and joyful elation.

Tailleferre's piano trio takes us to another world completely. One beyond our senses, of sights unseen and sounds unheard, with washes of colours that cannot quite be grasped, and fleeting melodies which morph just as we think we have managed to catch them. If the Brahms displays a startling reality and resonance with our humanity, the Tailleferre perhaps alludes to a mythical sphere where time spins at a different pace, shimmering scenes of water and light flash before us, and goblins can be heard dancing in uneven rhythms we do not recognise.

There is, however, a historical thread binding these two works which forms the basis of our programme for today: both works were rewritten decades after their initial publication during the composer's youth. Brahms's trio was initially published in 1854, and revised in 1889, whereas Tailleferre published her trio as a young composer in 1917, and then for the second time in 1978, sixty-one years later. In both instances, the composers heavily relied on the source material of the initial versions. Brahms reworked the second subjects in three movements and completely revolutionised the opening movement development to make it the masterpiece known and loved today. It is clear that the revised version of Op. 8, which will be performed today, represents Brahms's mature style, though thankfully he does not tamper with the glorious, opulent opening cello theme of his youth.

Tailleferre's revision took a different approach. Upon reconsideration, she replaced the second movement with a rambunctious rondo and added a new, zippy finale movement. The work demonstrates a deft and experienced composer with an excellent command of the subtlety of piano trio texture and melodic distribution, but still the work, even revised, sings of youth and optimistic imagination. As Milhaud rightly said, Tailleferre "was always twenty years old."

note written by Catherine Duncan