



LINN

Fountain of Youth

Shostakovich, Lisney & Korngold

MITHRAS TRIO





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BIOGRAPHIES



Fountain of Youth

Shostakovich, Lisney & Korngold

MITHRAS TRIO

IONEL MANCIU violin

LEO POPPLEWELL cello

DOMINIC DEGAVINO piano

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

1. **Piano Trio No. 1 in C minor 'Poème', Op. 8** 13:24

Joy Lisney (b. 1993)

Petrichor*

2. Lento moderato: Introduzione 3:02
3. Allegretto: Scherzo 1:41
4. Grazioso: Con moto 3:56

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897–1957)

Piano Trio in D major, Op. 1

5. Allegro non troppo, con espressione 10:46
6. Scherzo: Allegro 7:32
7. Larghetto 6:37
8. Finale: Allegro molto e energico 8:19

* *world-premiere recording*

Total Running Time 55:34

Fountain of Youth

I have always been fascinated by the question of why so many piano trios were written by composers at the very start of their careers. There are those that the composers deemed important enough to publish as their Opus 1, among them of course Beethoven, with his three masterful Op. 1 Trios; Franck, who also wrote three wonderful Trios as his Op. 1 (and, indeed, a fourth as his Op. 2!); and Korngold, whose reputation as the most musically talented child prodigy since Mozart is certainly justified in his Op. 1 Trio. Beyond this, a list of composers who wrote trios when they were 20 years old or younger includes Chopin, Debussy, Rachmaninov, Brahms, Shostakovich and Leonard Bernstein, among many others.

We can only speculate as to the reasons behind this. In my mind, I think the idea of writing a chamber music piece, rather than an orchestral piece (too expensive to perform), but perhaps not wanting to take on the rather intimidating task of tackling the string quartet, leads composers to consider the piano trio as a friendly, convenient option. Nevertheless, it is also one that allows them to be ambitious and write on a relatively large scale, if they wish. It is interesting to note how many of the composers above were formidable pianists themselves, who could, therefore, also use their trios as a way of showing off their performing talents.

It was a few years ago that the idea of the Mithras Trio performing a programme of exclusively trios by young composers first came about, and since then we have performed a few different programmes based on this concept. Soon after, when we had the opportunity to commission a new work for piano trio to be premiered at the Wigmore Hall in January 2023, we were delighted to add Joy Lisney's new work *Petrichor* to the list of 'early' trios we could programme. The watery theme of Lisney's piece leads us towards our title of the album, *Fountain of Youth*, a mythical spring believed to restore the youth of anyone who drinks or bathes in its waters. Indeed, such ancient inspiration can also be found in our Trio's name itself ...

Shostakovich wrote his First Piano Trio at the age of 16. He had been studying at the Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) Conservatory for three years. However, he was not particularly happy there, partly because there was a growing conflict between Shostakovich's 'obsession with the grotesque', as one of his professors put it, and the somewhat old-fashioned, rigid teaching at the Conservatory. The grotesque moments in this single-movement Trio can be seen as hints of Shostakovich's mature style, but in this instance, they are quite carefully enclosed within a late-romantic shell.

Romance of another kind is also a key element of the piece, as it was dedicated to a nurse, Tatyana Glivenko, who had been caring for Shostakovich while he was recovering from tuberculosis at a sanatorium in Crimea, shortly before he started writing the Trio. Shostakovich fell in love with her, and even contemplated marrying her for several years, although he never did. The original title for the Trio was 'Poème', a word which to me describes both the inspiration for the piece, as well as its relatively free treatment of the sonata form. The Trio was only published after Shostakovich's death, and some 22 bars of the piano part were lost over the intervening years. They were completed by Shostakovich's pupil, Boris Tishchenko.

The opening motif consists of two falling semitones, which we hear first in the cello, before being passed around the other instruments. This motif is present almost throughout the piece, aside from in the calm of the lyrical second subject. After the slow introduction, there is a scampering section (marked *molto più mosso*), based on the same material, and a return of the introductory tempo, before the piece finally settles into its home key of C minor. This *Allegro* section sees the previous motif extended into a longer melody, with foreboding chords in the piano part.

The aforementioned second subject is the lyrical heart of the piece, featuring long, singing lines, first in the cello, then the violin (later reversed in the recapitulation), that wouldn't feel out of place in a film score. Indeed, Shostakovich was working as a cinema pianist around this time, in order to supplement his family's income, and it is alleged that Shostakovich and two friends rehearsed this Piano Trio at the cinema as an accompaniment to a silent film. The audience is said to have been not entirely happy...

The following development section builds to several ferocious climaxes, before the recapitulation finds most of the themes returning as they should in a sonata form piece, albeit in a different order. At the end, the lyrical second subject returns once more in a triumphant, blazing C major.

Since founding the Mithras Trio in 2017, the three of us have always been interested in incorporating contemporary music into our repertoire alongside more familiar works, and the piece by Joy Lisney is a culmination of a long-held desire to take this interest further by commissioning a trio. Lisney, a cellist herself, is a close friend of our cellist Leo Popplewell, and it is from this relationship that the idea of her writing for us was born.

Petrichor is the name given to the earthy scent produced when rain falls on dry soil. However, Lisney writes that the music ‘does not attempt to directly depict an aroma, nor does it imitate the intonation and rhythms of rainfall. Rather, this music is concerned with the primal connection we have to water and its life-giving qualities’. The piece is divided into three short movements, of which the first two are connected without a pause.

The first movement serves as an introduction, and the music gradually fades into view with soft, falling phrases starting high in the register of violin and piano, followed by the cello. The phrases continue to explore different colours, yet without finding a true direction. Only towards the end of the movement do we find more forward motion, and a sonorous, rich climax, before the music again fades away.

The second movement is marked *Scherzo*, and for much of its length all three performers play in rhythmic unison. The music is full of jaunty syncopations and sudden dynamic changes. The third movement is the longest of the three, at just under half the duration of the entire piece. Its opening, suggests the composer, ‘might remind listeners of the first tentative drops of rain’. Soon, the strings introduce a quicker, syncopated line, which seems to weave around itself. The cello continues this line, while the violin and piano provide fragments of melody and harmony. The relative peace of the first section soon comes to an end, and the piano takes over the melody with the strings interjecting, sometimes violently.

The newfound energy soon dissipates, and we briefly return to the music of the opening. The pace quickens gradually, but to a great extent, before a striking, forceful section, with the weaving line returning, this time taking centre stage and marked *fff*. This state of heightened anxiety remains as the music becomes ever quieter, before a rousing coda brings the piece to a dramatic conclusion.

Korngold was born in Brünn in the Austrian Empire (modern day Brno, in Czechia), and, as the son of a music critic, was immersed in music from an early age. He was already playing piano duet arrangements with his father aged 5, began composing at the age of just 7 years old, was praised as a 'genius' by Mahler at the age of 9, and wrote his ballet *Der Schneemann* ('The Snowman') when he was 11, which caused a sensation when it was first performed in 1910.

8 The young Korngold's first published work, the Piano Trio, Op. 1, was written when he was 12 (not 13, as many sources incorrectly suggest). The Trio is written in a confident late-Romantic style influenced by Mahler, Strauss and Puccini, but already with a unique voice of his own, showing exceptional maturity for such a young composer. The premiere of the Trio in November 1910 featured three eminent Vienna musicians, violinist Arnold Rosé, concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, cellist Adolf Buxbaum and conductor Bruno Walter at the piano.

The opening movement begins with a graceful, sighing motif, played first in the piano, then taken up by the strings. The whole ensemble soon joins together for another version, this time in a swaggering fashion, before the energy dissipates. A searching, less certain transition then takes us into the expressive second subject, before an energetic codetta closes the exposition. The development section of the movement is full of inventiveness, energy and dramatic contrasts, leading to a powerful return of the opening theme, which seems to push the boundaries of what is possible with just three players.

The *Scherzo* second movement opens with a rather indignant sounding cello motif, but this tension soon fizzles out, and the piano alone introduces the dancing, playful main theme. The middle Trio section is much slower and rather suave. It often makes the three

of us think of a smoke-filled bar – not that Korngold would have had a lot of experience of that at his young age!

The third movement is slow, meditative and often tender. The main theme consists of a question and answer between cello and piano, both of which are ever-present in the opening section. There is then a slight increase in momentum, leading to a middle section in which the piano presents the opening theme in rich, orchestral-sounding chords, while the strings play a pizzicato accompaniment. As this fades away, the movement closes with a heavenly moment in which the strings play the main theme, while the piano plays broken chords, before fading softly away.

The virtuoso finale, meanwhile, seems to delight in introducing endless contrasting themes and ideas. Within this, there is a sense of conflict between the calmer main theme, and the various more energetic ones which surround it. This resolves into a sort of Viennese waltz, in which themes from earlier movements also return, before racing towards a dramatic ending.

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MITHRAS TRIO

Praised for their ‘exhilarating, highly-toned’ performances (*The Arts Desk*), the Mithras Trio was established in 2017 at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. The three musicians shot to international recognition winning first prize at the 10th Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition in 2019. In the same year they also achieved first prizes in the 67th Royal Over-Seas League Music Competition and Cavatina Intercollegiate Chamber Music Competition, and were recipients of the Royal Philharmonic Society Henderson Award. Named as BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists for the 2021-2023 seasons, they have recorded extensively for BBC Radio 3, as well as giving live-broadcast concerts from the Cheltenham, Hay, Ryedale and Belfast International Music festivals.

10 They have performed at many of London’s major venues, including Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Milton Court Concert Hall, and have also appeared in concert across Europe and North America. They were selected as Kirckman Concert Society Young Artists for the 2019-2020 season, and Countess of Munster Trust Recital Scheme Artists for 2020-2023. In 2024 they were named as Borletti-Buitoni Trust award winners.

They are passionate exponents of contemporary music, having worked extensively with Helen Grime and Julian Philips, and have given world premieres of works by Péter Tornyai and Joy Lisney. They released their debut album for Linn Records, titled ‘Eros’, in November 2023.



The Borletti-Buitoni Trust (BBT) helps young artists and charitable organisations around the world. Artist Awards and Fellowships are offered to young musicians to nurture sustainable international careers; Artist Encore Awards reconnect with them later into their careers, by supporting them to imagine and deliver socially-driven musical projects in the communities where they live and work; and Community Grants offer financial support to international charities that are reaching marginalised and disadvantaged communities through music.

Recorded at Menuhin Hall, Surrey, UK,
on 17-19 February 2025

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