

**TRIO ANIMA MUNDI – SONG WITHOUT WORDS**  
**Thursday 28 May at 7pm (AEST) – Melbourne Digital Concert Hall**

Rutland Boughton – *Celtic Prelude: The Land of Heart's Desire*  
Carl Gottlieb Reissiger – Piano Trio No.4, Op.56, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement  
Johan Halvorsen – *Passacaglia in G minor on a Theme by Handel* for violin and cello  
Kenji Fujimura – *Three Albumleaves* for piano solo (world premiere)  
Felix Mendelssohn – Piano Trio No.1 in D minor, Op.49

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**Rutland Boughton – *Celtic Prelude: The Land of Heart's Desire***

Rutland Boughton began his studies at the Royal College of Music, London, in 1898 after his music talent attracted the attention of a number of musicians, resulting in him receiving financial support from a number of people, including the Rothchild family, to study there. Studying under Charles Villiers Stanford and Walford Davies, he left the College in 1901 and began his career as a répétiteur and accompanist, before being approached by Sir Granville Bantock to join the staff at the Birmingham and Midland Institute of Music (now known as the Birmingham Conservatoire).

Boughton was interested in history throughout his life. An initial plan had been to create a fourteen-day cycle of dramas on the life of Christ; this was not to come to fruition but his Nativity opera *Bethlehem* was written in 1915. He wrote five operas based on the legend of King Arthur, beginning with *The Birth of Arthur* in 1909 and finishing with *Avalon* in 1945. By 1911 Boughton had moved to Glastonbury – where King Arthur is purportedly buried – initially to establish an annual summer music school. In 1912 he composed what is recognised as his most successful work, *The Immortal Hour*, based on Celtic mythology. With successful productions in Glastonbury and in Birmingham, *The Immortal Hour* received over three hundred performances in 1922-1923.

Although Boughton continued to compose throughout his life, his political beliefs and support of the 1926 'miners' lockout' general strike, during which he insisted that *Bethlehem* be produced with Herod as a capitalist and Jesus being born in a miner's hut, made him a *persona non grata*, most likely contributing to his relative obscurity in recent times.

The *Celtic Prelude – The Land of Heart's Desire* was completed in April 1917, a few years after *The Immortal Hour*, and can be seen as a little study-sketch into his exploration of Celtic mythology. A short, through-composed work, it begins boldly in A mixolydian mode, before presenting a number of themes in contrasting moods and keys. The original majestic theme return very briefly before a lively, dainty coda brings the work to a quiet close.

The first commercial recording of this work was made by Trio Anima Mundi and has been released on the Divine Art Records label (January 2020) - <https://divineartrecords.com/recording/english-piano-trios/>

**Carl Gottlieb Reissiger – Piano Trio No.4, Op.56: Andante non troppo**

Carl Gottlieb Reissiger may not be a familiar name to many, though he was a figure of considerable stature during his lifetime. One work by Reissiger which seems to have endured was misattributed to Carl Maria von Weber, as the manuscript of the piece was found amongst the latter's papers at his death – *Weber's Last Waltz*.

Born in Belzig, Germany, as the second son of the cantor Christian Gottlieb Reissiger, he first studied piano and violin from his father. From 1811 he attended the Thomasschule in Leipzig where he studied piano and composition with Johann Gottfried Schicht, in addition to violin, viola, and singing classes. After a short stint in the Gewandhaus orchestra during 1819-1820, he attended the University of Leipzig and read theology. However, heeding Schicht's advice, he abandoned his studies to pursue music. He first moved to Vienna to study under Antonio Salieri, before heading to Munich in 1822 to continue his development under Peter von Winter. Relocating to Berlin in 1823 he soon established himself there with the assistance of many patrons including the Stobwasser family.

Writing his first opera, *Das Rockweiblein*, in 1821-1823, he followed this work with another opera, *Didone abbandonata*, which became his first opera to be presented publicly; Carl Maria von Weber conducted the premiere in Dresden in 1824. This led to an eighteen-month educational sojourn through France and Italy funded by the Prussian Ministry of Culture. Returning to Berlin in 1825, Reissiger replaced Heinrich Marschner as music director of the Hofoper in Dresden in 1826. With a few more operatic successes through *Oberon* and *Euryanthe*, he eventually secured, in 1828, the highly sought-after position of the Dresden court Kapellmeister, succeeding Weber.

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Reissiger's career flourished after his appointment both professionally and personally. He elevated the Dresden opera to be the best in Germany, developed a good reputation as a conductor, and was well liked by all. He also married his former piano student, Marie Stobwasser in 1828. Reissiger premiered Richard Wagner's opera *Rienzi* in 1842 to great success, prompting Wagner to be appointed second Kapellmeister alongside Reissiger. However, from this point on until Wagner's departure from Dresden in 1849 things were not as rosy (though most historians acknowledge that Wagner was most likely to blame for the deterioration of their relationship).

In the final decade of his life Reissiger's output diminished due to his heavy administrative load and poor health. Contemplating retirement as early as 1854, his succession plan (to appoint Hector Berlioz) bore no fruit. Suffering a stroke in 1858, this forced him to take some leave in Karlsbad. However, a second stroke in 1859 ended his life. In 1860 the Dresden orchestra's Ash Wednesday concerts, which had been created by Reissiger in 1850, were dedicated to his memory – the programs contained, with the exception of Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony, all compositions by Reissiger. Other organisations also presented concerts in his memory, performing works such as his Requiem and oratorio *David*.

Reissiger's compositional output included nine operas, dozens of piano music and songs, many choral works, piano and strings quartets, and twenty-eight piano trios. Today's selection is the slow movement from his fourth piano trio, published in 1829.

**Johan Halvorsen – *Passacaglia in G minor on a Theme by Handel* for violin and cello**

Johan Halvorsen was a prominent Norwegian musician, perhaps only eclipsed in fame by Grieg (whose niece he eventually married). Starting his career as a violinist – including a stint in the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra – he continued to add extra strings to his bow, becoming a professor of music in Helsinki in 1889, then chief conductor of the Kristiania National Theatre in 1899 and principal conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic in 1893.

As a composer he wrote an operetta, much incidental music, and various works for chamber and orchestral settings. Many of his larger-scale works date from the latter part of his career, including his three symphonies, which were all written in the 1920s.

The *Passacaglia in G minor* was penned in 1893 and is based on the final *Passacaille* movement of the G minor harpsichord suite (HWV432) by Georg Frederic Handel. Taking Handel's eight-chord bass line as the starting point, Halvorsen intersperses his own reimagination of Handel's variations with an array of his own creative variants, resulting in a most powerful and virtuosic interplay between the violin and cello.

**Kenji Fujimura – *Three Albumleaves* for piano solo (world premiere)**

I - La Simplicité

II – Reverie

III – Song Without Words

These three miniatures for piano stem from some sketches by the composer dating from the 1980s, rediscovered in 2019 from amongst many old papers and manuscripts. An 'album leaf' was traditionally a short composition with a dedication, intended for the dedicatee's personal album or autograph book. Tweaked, typeset, and given titles in 2019, these *Three Albumleaves* share a contented mood throughout. As the titles suggest, the first two vignettes are somewhat more gentle and serene in their outlook, whereas the third blossoms like the flowers in the spring. The collection is dedicated to the composer's wife. Sheet music available from: <https://www.sheetmusicplus.com/title/three-albumleaves-for-solo-piano-digital-sheet-music/21408488>

**Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy – *Piano Trio No.1 in D minor, Op.49***

I – Molto allegro ed agitato

II – Andante con moto tranquillo

III – Scherzo

IV – Finale

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy came from a distinguished intellectual and artistic banking family, and was raised in a privileged environment (the family's conversion from Judaism to Christianity in 1816 saw the addition of 'Bartholdy' to their name). His precocious musical talent was evident from an early age, with the composition of his *Octet, Op.20* in 1825, and the incidental music to a *Midsummer Night's Dream, Op.21* in 1826, at the tender age of seventeen. Mendelssohn's ability as a conductor was also seen as early as 1829, when he directed a pioneering performance of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, creating the momentum for a revival of Bach's music, which had been neglected in the years since the great master's death in 1750.

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The *Piano Trio No.1 in D minor, Op.49*, written in 1839, was a product from his early Leipzig years (1835-47), where he conducted the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra to great acclaim. In 1840, Robert Schumann, in reviewing the work, declared it the ‘master trio of the present’. Schumann claimed Mendelssohn to be the ‘Mozart of the nineteenth century, the most discerning musician, who looks most clearly through the contradictions of the present and for the first time reconciles them’.

However, Schumann may well have been unaware that the trio, having been composed in June and July of the previous year, had undergone a thorough and severe revision, with a second substantially altered version produced in September. An important part of the revision was of the piano part, prompted by the urging of his friend and colleague, Ferdinand Hiller. Hiller recalled in his biography of Mendelssohn:

I was tremendously impressed by the fire and spirit...but I had one small misgiving. Certain pianoforte passages in it...seemed to me...somewhat old-fashioned... One day, when I found him working at it, he played me a bit which he had worked out exactly as I had suggested to him on the piano, and called out to me, “That is to remain as a remembrance of you”.

The *Molto allegro agitato* first movement begins with a dark and noble cello theme, later joined by the violin, against an agitated piano backdrop. The piano writing in this movement, and throughout the work, is technically demanding and virtuosic in its treatment.

The *Andante con molto tranquillo* is reminiscent of Mendelssohn’s own *Lieder ohne Worte* (*Songs without words*), with the gentle interplay between keyboard and strings in the outer sections contrasted by a slightly more restless middle section in the parallel minor key.

The playful nature of the *Scherzo*, already a trademark of Mendelssohn (those in the *Octet* and the *Midsummer Night’s Dream* come to mind), is established at the very beginning with the piano. The movement is in a rondo-like form, with three main motives being repeated twice, and the first section repeated three times. The light-hearted quality and frivolity of the movement evaporate into *pianissimo* chords at the end.

The *Finale* is also cast in the same rondo-like scheme as the *scherzo*, but the jovial atmosphere is gone. The restless, uneasy character of the first movement returns, although there is a brief respite in B flat Major, glancing back at the *Lied ohne Worte* second movement both in nature and in key. The final evocation of the first theme is in D Major, perhaps a fleeting reference to the elfin-like scherzo, before a triumphant close

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International award-winning **TRIO ANIMA MUNDI** – Kenji Fujimura (piano), Rochelle Ughetti (violin), Noella Yan (cello) – is renowned for its ‘Piano Trio Archaeology’ - presenting these ‘findings’ alongside masterpieces of the piano trio genre and freshly-minted contemporary compositions. They are praised for their ‘fine playing’ (International Record Review) and for ‘interpretations [which] bring out the freshness of the works’ (American Record Guide).

Their latest recording, *English Piano Trios* (January 2020) – an ‘eminently worthwhile release’ (International Piano) – received rapturous reviews globally with one critic stating that ‘I can’t fault the playing of the Trio Anima Mundi who impress with their directness and level of expression, so consistent in teamwork’. (Musicweb International). Featuring five world-premiere recordings of music by Boughton, Coleridge-Taylor, Ellicott, Forrester, and Warner, it was named an ‘Audiophile Essential’ (Hi-Res Audio, Germany), a featured classical album on Apple Music, and Recording of the Month on Musicweb International upon its release.

This year, Trio Anima Mundi commenced The Reissiger Project – a world-first survey of all twenty-eight piano trios by Reissiger. The resultant recordings will be published globally on the Toccata Classics label. If you would like to support this mammoth project, please visit <https://australianculturalfund.org.au/projects/the-reissiger-project/>

**www.trioanimamundi.com**

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Trio Anima Mundi would like to thank Chris Howlett and Adele Schonhardt for their creation, commitment, and dedication to the Melbourne Digital Concert Hall, and for extending an invitation to us to perform at MDCH this evening.