

Rhona Clarke

A DIFFERENT GAME  
The Fidelio Trio



métier

<b>Piano Trio No 3</b> (2002, revised 2015)			<b>10:35</b>
①	I	<i>Tenderly</i> (♩ = 96)	6:08
②	II	<i>Expectantly</i> (♩. = 96)	4:26
③ <b>Gleann Dá Loch</b> (1995, revised 1996), for piano solo			<b>8:52</b>
<b>Piano Trio No. 2</b> (2001, revised 2015)			<b>8:15</b>
④	I		4:28
⑤	II		3:47
⑥ <b>Con Coro</b> (2011) for violin, cello and tape			<b>9:50</b>
<b>Piano Trio No. 4 “A Different Game”</b> (2016)			<b>19:33</b>
⑦	I	<i>Moderato</i> (♩ = 108)	6:14
⑧	II	<i>Moderato</i> (♩ = 108) – <i>Allegro</i> (♩ = c.132)	4:25
⑨	III	<i>Largo</i> (♩ = 58)	3:55
⑩	IV	<i>Allegro</i> (♩ = c.120); <i>Driven</i>	4:57
⑪ <b>In Umbra</b> (2000, revised 2016), for solo cello			<b>5:50</b>
<b>total duration:</b>			<b>63:17</b>

## The Fidelio Trio

Darragh Morgan, violin | Adi Tal, cello | Mary Dullea, piano

## Rhona Clarke: Stepping out of the shadow

While not wanting to over-interpret the title of the last piece on this CD, *In umbra* ('in the shadow'), the image comes in handy as a circumscription of the long overdue recognition for Rhona Clarke in this first album of music exclusively dedicated to her. Too long has her name loomed in the shadows of contemporary Irish music, not to speak of European music. Her music comes out of a niche in a niche in a niche (contemporary chamber music as part of 'classical' music as part of music in Ireland) – where all true discoveries can be made. Irish composers are a rare breed indeed – little known in Europe, little even in Ireland (while Ireland is no exception here compared to other countries, they are even less expected in Ireland). Perceptions prevail that allow little room for things that challenge fixed opinions. Yet, without such challenges we will add nothing to our knowledge, nothing to widen our horizons.

Even the small world of contemporary Irish art music has composers standing in the spotlight and others who don't – and I dare say it has little to do with originality or integrity. That is why it is so important that an original and integer composer such as Rhona Clarke is finally given the opportunity to step out of the shadow of other (more prominent, more extrovert, more published, etc.) Irish composers and presents her calling card.

Rhona Clarke was born in Dublin in 1958. She had been a member of the Lindsay Singers for many years, which accounts for the large proportion of choral music in her list of works. Indeed, hers is a household name for Irish choirs, with several achieving awards for performances of her work; the most recent of these was to the Mornington Singers of Dublin, for the performance of a contemporary Irish choral work at the City of Derry Choral Festival, with their rendition of Clarke's *Regina Coeli* (2007). She studied the piano at the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama and graduated with Bachelor of Music degree from University College Dublin in 1980.

Clarke entered the world of composition comparatively late. Several times from 1985 she attended the Ennis Composition Summer School that was led by James Wilson (1922–2005) and John Buckley (b. 1951) and studied composition at Queen's University Belfast with Michael Alcorn (b. 1962), graduating with a Ph.D. in 1996. She has been a Lecturer in Music at St Patrick's College, Dublin City University, since 1999. In 2005, she was elected to Aosdána, the Irish academy of distinguished creative artists.

She has written music in many genres including orchestral, vocal and choral, chamber and solo, and also a fair amount of electro-acoustic music. The combination of strings and keys is close to her creative imagination. Several of her chamber music compositions include solo strings with piano. The piano is, after all, her own instrument – although she has written very few pieces for solo piano – and both of her parents had played violin at high amateur level. She also undertook cello lessons for a number of years. The presence of excellent chamber ensembles in Ireland with an active interest in contemporary music has helped her career considerably; a number of her chamber works were commissioned by the ensemble Concorde, including two works on this CD.

Recent music is influenced by her collaborative work with the visual artist Marie Hanlon and other exposures to contemporary and modern art such as Venice Biennale and Art Basel. Of particular significance were several visits to the Picasso Museum at Antibes since around 2006: the bold, confident, definite strokes of the (apparently simple) line drawings, the energy of the maker emanating from these – there is a force in her recent music that stems from a desire to achieve these same dynamics musically.

Unmistakably, there is also an element, an influence, an interest in jazz, very clearly audible (tonally, harmonically, rhythmically) in the opening piece on this CD. While listeners should not be deceived to expect tonal music across the

further course of pieces on this album, it does show that Rhona Clarke does not shy away from tonality if it suits her intentions. And these intentions come to full maturity in the work that lends this album its title, the Piano Trio No. 4, *A Different Game*. Also linked to jazz is a desire to use improvisation as part of the composition. Again, *A Different Game* is such an example as it is largely based on manipulation of pre-recorded electroacoustic material.

Much of the work on this album was influenced by the association with the Fidelio Trio while they were artists-in-residence at St Patrick's College between 2012 and 2015. During this period she had organised several Composition Forums, for both undergraduate and international postgraduate students, once including a performance of John Cage's *Musircircus*. She closely observed how the trio approached works in rehearsal and workshop readings and became acquainted with the musicians on a personal level. They also gave a number of concerts each year, each of which included at least one contemporary work for piano trio. A previous CD, 'Dancing in Daylight' (métier msv 28556), marked the end of this residency with piano trios by Seóirse Bodley, John Buckley, Fergus Johnston and Rhona Clarke's own Piano Trio No. 2.

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## The music

### **Piano Trio No 3** (2002, revised 2015)

Piano Trio No 3 was commissioned by Jane O'Leary and Concorde to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of composer James Wilson, to whom it is dedicated. It was first performed at the Hugh Lane, Dublin City Gallery, in September 2002 by Concorde: Alan Smale (violin), David James (cello) and Jane O'Leary (piano).

The first movement is based on complex tonal chords and syncopated rhythms normally associated with jazz. A more questioning central section brings in a descending triplet, which becomes the subject for conversation between the instruments, leading to a short cello cadenza. A variation of the opening then returns. While not especially fast, the second movement contrasts with the smooth quality of the first; the opening, descending motif has the outline of a tritone and it is followed with an idea that plays with strict but distorted metre, sounding rather like a mechanical toy that starts to break down and then is wound up again.

### ***Gleann Dá Loch*** (1995, revised. 1996)

The inspiration for this piece came from the landscape of the upper lake at Glendalough (from the Irish: *gleann dá loch*: 'glen of two lakes – Glendalough is the site of an old monastic settlement in Co. Wicklow, Ireland.)

The dramatic contrast between the powerful, dark mountains on either side of a very still, glistening lake, and the resonance caused by light on that landscape, are the features which stimulated the ideas for the piece.

Previous to the visit to Glendalough, I had already completed some of the work and knew the kind of harmonic language I wanted to use. The qualities of the scene led to ideas, pointing me in the direction of how I might explore timbre and texture. One result of this was alternating chords at either extreme of the

instrument with rapid, scale movement, combining this with extreme dynamics. The piece evolved as one continuous movement in two sections.

Section 1: This contains an exposition and development of ideas moving between the outer extremes to the middle range of the instrument. For the most part it is monodic, with light open textures. It finishes with a descending scale, the hands playing two octaves apart.

Section 2: The same material is developed further. This time, strong, homophonic chordal statements alternate with scales and spread chords, and finally with two different scales in contrary motion.

### **Piano Trio No 2** (2001, revised 2015)

This work was composed to be included in a programme dedicated to my music for strings and piano, presented at the Hugh Lane, Dublin Municipal Gallery in 2001. The premiere was given by Gilliam Williams (violin), Arun Rao (cello) and Anthony Byrne (piano), and subsequently it has been played by The Vienna Mozart and Fidelio trios. The piece has two contrasting movements. In the first of these, the violin and cello hold a rather romantic conversation over a barely-moving, chordal ostinato on the piano. A fast, fugal second movement follows; the spare-textured, rhythmic style is influenced by Bartók, and contains a slower, reflective section about three quarters through, echoing elements of the first movement.

### ***Con Coro*** (2011) for violin, cello and tape

The title (given after the piece was completed) would indicate that the piece is performed “with choir” or “with vocal ensemble”. In this case what seems like a choir, is provided by sampling my own voice singing extracts of the plainchant *Ubi Caritas*. The location of *The Rubicon Gallery* for the first performance suggested

that the piece should be performed for a blindfolded audience. Although this may seem perverse in a location where people usually enter with a heightened visual expectation, the idea is to focus solely on the aural dimension, not only for the sounds themselves, but also for the direction from which the sounds emerge; for instance, a cello note on the tape may be followed by the same note played by the live cello, each coming from different parts of the space. The visual dimension of the performance is negated, allowing only what is perceived through the ears.

The piece was commissioned by the ensemble Concorde for their *Up Close With Music Series*. It is dedicated to Jane O'Leary and Concorde on their 35th anniversary. The first performance took place on the 27th November 2011 played by Elaine Clark, violin and Martin Johnson, cello. It has subsequently been played in Chicago at The Green Mill, in Belfast, at the MAC, and in Dublin at The Kevin Barry Room, National Concert Hall.

### ***A Different Game, Piano Trio No 4* (2016)**

*A Different Game* was written for, and is dedicated to The Fidelio Trio. The title refers to recent approaches in my composition where improvisation into a sequencing program forms the basis of a composition, as opposed to notating initial ideas on manuscript. The 'game', can be compared to the unselfconscious behaviour of children at play. Much of the material for this piano trio came about in this way, producing initial ideas, which were then worked into a structure.

The first movement developed from a short piece called 'Forethought', originally composed as a sound installation for a joint exhibition with visual artist Marie Hanlon. Jagged, questioning, impulsive and dissonant ideas form the outer sections of the movement, while the main section is tonal and broadly speaking,



in the realm of minimalism fused with jazz. An imitative idea is tossed around between the instruments with frequent octave unison between violin and cello playing a syncopated melody.

The second movement is based on the disintegration of a waltz. Only parts of the three-pulse structure exist at first, while a central, faster section reveals more traditional rhythms in the piano part. The piece finishes with the strings only, stating the type of gestures usually associated with the accompaniment of waltzes.

A wide expanse on the keyboard and a contemplative mood take over in the third movement, the only one that is smooth, flowing and without agitation. There are links between the finale and the second movement, the latter being a strange kind of waltz and the fourth movement a crazed dance also (mostly) in triple metre. Cluster chords underpin a melodic line shared by all the instruments; at times the strings break away momentarily from the heavy texture to play some trill-like passages. A cuckoo call, which first appears in the *Allegro* section of the second movement, also features here along with its inversion, becoming insistent in its repetition at the end.

***In Umbra*** (2000, revised 2016)

This is a single-movement piece for solo cello. It was composed for that same concert at the Hugh Lane, Dublin Municipal Gallery in 2001 when it was first performed by Arun Rao. Marked 'freely', the piece is lyrical and expressive giving plenty of scope for interpretation by the performer. Coming at the end of this CD it forms a kind of contemplative epilogue.

## The composer



Further information: <http://www.rhonaclarke.com/>

**Rhona Clarke** was born in Dublin. She studied music at University College, Dublin, pursued composition studies with John Buckley and James Wilson, and completed a Ph.D at Queen's University, Belfast under the supervision of Michael Alcorn. She is a lecturer in music at Dublin City University and her output includes choral, chamber, orchestral and electronic works. Clarke has received commissions from RTÉ, the Cork International Choral Festival, Concorde, Music Network and the National Concert Hall, among others, performed by groups such as The RTÉNSO, The Fidelio Trio, The Vienna Mozart Trio, Concorde, Chamber Choir Ireland, The Tyrolean Ensemble and ConTempo Quartet. Amongst her orchestral works, in 2014 SHIFT was premiered in the Horizons series at the National Concert Hall, Dublin and later that year represented Ireland at The International Rostrum of Composers in Helsinki.

Her choral music has been commissioned and performed by choirs in Ireland and worldwide, from school choirs to amateur and professional adult choirs. The latter include Chamber Choir Ireland, The Sydney Philharmonia Choir, The BBC singers, State Choir Latvija, The University of Minnesota, Duluth, Cantairi Avondale, New Dublin Voices, Laetare, Bella Voce and The Mornington Singers.

Since 2009 she has been collaborating with visual artist Marie Hanlon, including short experimental films with music, live music with visual projections and joint exhibitions; a joint exhibition with Hanlon at Draíocht, Dublin, took place from July-September 2014 containing six new sound installations and also Hanlon's exhibition at Solstice Arts Centre contained three collaborative works including an installation 'Everything we see...' which is based on a painting and text by René Magritte.

Rhona Clarke is a member of Aosdána, Ireland's state-sponsored academy of creative artists.

## The Fidelio Trio

The ...virtuosic Fidelio Trio... (Sunday Times) are Darragh Morgan, violin, Adi Tal, cello and Mary Dullea, piano. Shortlisted for the 2016 Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards, the Fidelio Trio are enthusiastic champions of the piano trio genre, performing the widest possible range of repertoire on concert stages across the world; they are broadcast regularly on BBC Radio 3, RTÉ Lyric FM, WNYC, NPR and featured on Sky Arts documentaries; they have a impressive list of commissions and first performances from the leading and newest composers and have a large discography of highly acclaimed recordings.

Since their debut at London's Southbank Centre, they have appeared at the Wigmore Hall and Kings Place and at festivals from Brighton and Cheltenham to St. Magnus and from Gregynog to Huddersfield; regularly performing across the Irish Sea at National Concert Hall, Dublin, Kilkenny Festival and Belfast Festival at Queens and overseas in Shanghai, Porto, Paris, Venice & Florence, Johannesburg, New York City, Princeton, San Francisco and Boston.

Their extensive discography includes Korngold and Schoenberg (Verklärte Nacht arr. Steuermann) for Naxos; the complete Michael Nyman Piano Trios for MN Records; multiple releases on NMC, Delphian Records and Convivium including portrait CDs for composers such as Luke Bedford and Michael Zev Gordon. Their next release this year will be the Ravel and Saint-Saëns trios for Resonus Classics.

Keen to ensure the future of the piano trio, The Fidelio Trio work closely with composition and performance students at institutions across the UK and all over the world including the Peabody Conservatory, Curtis Institute, Stellenbosch Conservatorium and WITS Johannesburg and have been artists-in-residence at St. Patrick's College Dublin City University, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and the State University of New York, SUNY.

They are constantly commissioning new works, giving first performances and, importantly, further performances to introduce them into the repertoire. Composers that the Trio has worked closely with include Toshio Hosokawa, Charles Wuorinen, Johannes Maria Staud, Michael Nyman, Gerald Barry, Donnacha Dennehy, Evan Ziporyn, Simon Bainbridge, Judith Weir ... to name but few.

Inspirational musicians The Fidelio Trio have collaborated with include Nicholas Daniel (oboe), Richard Watkins (horn), Joan Rodgers and Patricia Rozario (soprano), and with spoken word, author Alexander McCall Smith and poet, Sinéad Morrissey.

The 2015-16 season has included a series of French Piano Trios at St. John's Smith Square, a residency at University of Birmingham, a tour of India, the 'Beyond Borders' PRS for Music Foundation tour of UK and Ireland with composer Piers Hellawell and T.S. Eliot Prize-winning poet Sinéad Morrissey, many festival appearances and an extensive tour of Asia. They continue as Artistic Directors of their annual Winter Chamber Music Festival St. Patrick's College, Dublin and continue to be passionate in their advocacy for the piano trio across the world.

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The  
Fidelio  
Trio

:

Adi  
Tal

Darragh  
Morgan

Mary  
Dullea

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Photos of Rhona Clarke by Marie Hanlon

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### **The Fidelio Trio also feature on:**

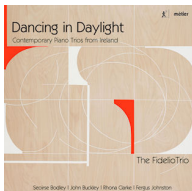
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Rhona Clarke



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