

PIANO TRIO (1990-91) — Roger Smalley (b.1943)

- PART 1—I *Prelude*
II *Scherzo*
PART 2—III *Passacaglia*
IV *Variations*

My Piano Trio was commissioned as an obligatory work for all trios entering the 1991 Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition. For practical reasons it could not be too long (it plays, in fact, for about 13 minutes) but within this relatively limited duration I tried to create a wide variety of moods and textures.

The trio is in two parts, each of which consists of two linked movements—a short slow movement which acts as an introduction to a longer fast movement. Following my *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* for solo piano (1988-89) this Piano Trio is the next in a continuing series of works based on material extracted from various Chopin Mazurkas (in this case an extremely chromatic 8-bar progression which occurs towards the end of the Mazurka in A♭ Op 59 no 2).

The opening *Prelude* presents the whole of this progression, stretched out over the entire length of the movement and embellished with sighing chromatic figures. This leads, via a prolonged dominant seventh chord, directly into the *Scherzo*, whose form could be represented as A B A C D A—in other words it has three 'trios' (B, C and D) but the second and third are joined, without the expected interpolation of A. The final return of A is truncated and the first part ends abruptly. This *Scherzo* is only tangentially related to the Chopin.

Part 2 opens with a slow *Passacaglia* during which the Chopin progression is unfolded (from the bass up) as four superimposed contrapuntal lines, rather than as a series of harmonies as in the *Prelude*. The 13 *Variations* which follow are generally based on one of these lines, or feature a common interval extracted from all four lines. The first 6 variations are fast and vigorous, leading to a climax in variation 7—loud repeated chords in the bass of the piano out of which emerge ethereal harmonics on the two strings. The final 6 variations are slow and in the form of a chaconne. The music draws ever closer to the Chopin original, but the work ends ambivalently.

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The above note may be used in concert programmes.

SIGNS USED IN THE SCORE

- a light staccato
- ▼ a more incisive staccato
- long, *espressivo*
- ≡ slightly separated from the next attack
- + pizzicato with the left hand
- ♯ snap ('Bartok') pizzicato
- ⊕ thumb position (cello)
- ↑ 1 octave higher } cancelled by *loco*
- ↓ 1 octave lower }

An accidental applies only to the note it precedes and to immediate repetitions of the same note.

Accidentals are cancelled by ♯ within a bar.

Bowings may be modified to suit individual taste.

Metronome marks should be followed closely, but not slavishly.

DURATION ca. 13 minutes