

STOLEN MUSIC

LINOS PIANO TRIO

Debussy • Ravel • Dukas • Schönberg



STOLEN MUSIC Transcriptions for Piano Trio

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

- 1 **Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune** 10:28
arr. by Linos Piano Trio

PAUL DUKAS (1865-1935)

- 2 **L'apprenti sorcier** 12:28
arr. by Linos Piano Trio

ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG (1874-1951)

Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4

- 3 I. Sehr langsam 06:30
4 II. Breiter 06:04
5 III. Schwer betont 02:21
6 IV. Sehr breit und langsam 09:56
7 V. Sehr ruhig 04:28

arr. by Eduard Steuermann

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

- 8 **La Valse** 12:44
arr. by Linos Piano Trio

Total Time 65:04

Recording: | 2021, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Studio 2,
Munich / Germany

Executive Producer: Falk Häfner

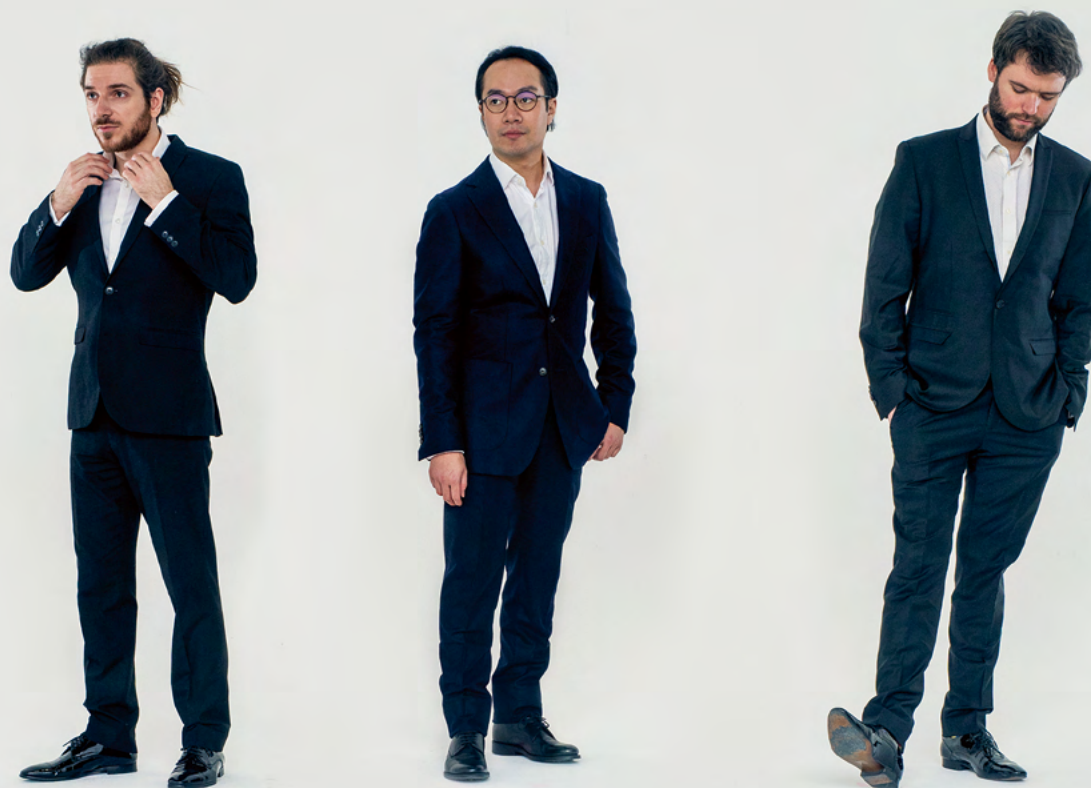
Recording Producer & Editing & Mastering: Clemens Deller

Recording Engineer: Klemens Kamp

Piano Technician: Romina Tobar

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LINOS
PIANO TRIO

PRACH BOONDISKULCHOK Piano · **KONRAD ELIAS-TROSTMANN** Violin · **VLADIMIR WALTHAM** Cello

STOLEN...

„Good composers borrow, great ones steal.” — Igor Stravinsky

It has always been a fascination for each of us to push against musical boundaries, so it is only too fitting that our ensemble’s “origin story” is centred around a work beyond the boundaries of the piano trio genre. Back in 2007, when obscure pieces were not yet widely digitised, I remember excitedly discovering that one of my favourite pieces, Schönberg’s *Verklärte Nacht* for string sextet, also existed in a transcription for piano trio by Eduard Steuermann. I was soon joined to play this by colleagues who share this enthusiasm, and this was the ensemble that became the Linos Piano Trio.

Playing this “masterpiece” in arrangement, we experienced something between guilt and glee: as young students who had been trained to believe in the sacred authenticity of “the original work”, we were transgressing the code of serious music by choosing a transcription as a starting piece for an ensemble. But at the same time, we were consumed by the thrill of the virtuosity and imagination demanded of the three of us to play music written for six people. From the challenges of playing string sextet music as a piano trio, we learned something valuable: that the piano trio can never sound like a string sextet. Our job was to play the transcription in a way that it sounds like a trio composition.

In 2016, while revisiting *Verklärte Nacht*, we decided to take this idea further with a series of our own transcriptions, created collaboratively with the aim of *reimagining* each work as if originally conceived for piano trio. Inspired by Stravinsky’s provocative quote, behind which lies a serious proposition of the creative act of taking something and making it one’s own, we call this project “*Stolen Music*”.

Stolen Music begs an interesting question: who owns the music? The composers? The performers?

What about when Liszt paraphrases Wagner? What about folk songs? In fact, with some historical perspective, the idea of the superior original version of a piece of music as intended by the author is but a very recent construct. Across various times and cultures, most music has existed in a multiplicity of interpretations, versions, variations and paraphrases. Seen in this light, music is in fact always about collaboration: a creative chain of give and take (steal?) from tradition to innovation, improvising to composing, interpreting to appropriating, with multiple authors and owners. Perhaps the true “owners” of the music are, ultimately, us—the listeners and performers, because music, rather than being the notes on the page, actually exists in the form of a living, breathing performance, experienced through communal listening. As such, transcriptions enable a piece of music to live and breathe *more*, transcending the boundaries of the original versions. (Plus, we get to play whatever music we love, trio or not!)

...MUSIC

The four works in this recording share a common thread: all are imbued with poetic images of transformation. Three of these works—by Debussy, Dukas and Schönberg—are compositions based on poems of the same titles by Mallarmé, Goethe, and Dehmel. Ravel’s *La Valse*, while not based on an actual poem, was subtitled a “choreographic poem” by the composer.

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

Claude Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*, composed in 1894, is now considered a seminal work for its exquisite craftsmanship and revolutionary use of harmony. Inspired by Stéphane Mallarmé’s poem *L’après-midi d’un faune*, Debussy’s tone-poem captures Mallarmé’s free-floating sense of



Fig. 1, Édouard Manet's drawing (1876) for Mallarmé's *L'après-midi d'un faune*.

time, as if in a day-dream: "... the air drowsy with dense slumbers. / Did I love a dream?" The poem unfolds as the quasi stream-of-consciousness monologue of a faun, symbolised by his instrument, the reed flute. In fact, this instrument is itself already the product of a transformation: the beautiful

nymph Syrinx, escaping the faun Pan's lustful pursuit, turned herself into water reeds by the river, which Pan then transformed into his instrument, the panpipes. Debussy evokes this instrument with the flute solo that opens this piece—further transformed in this transcription to be played by the violin. Although the violin's sound is further removed than the flute from the faun's reed pipes, its vocal quality captures more of the poem's languid eroticism. Evocative as the piece is, Debussy was quick to defend the piece against literal readings, remarking:

"The music of this prelude is a very free illustration of Mallarmé's beautiful poem. By no means does it claim to be a synthesis of it. Rather there is a succession of scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of the afternoon. Then, tired of pursuing the timorous flight of nymphs and naiads, he succumbs to intoxicating sleep, in which he can finally realize his dreams of possession in universal Nature."

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

L'apprenti sorcier by Paul Dukas (1897) is a work so well-known that many more people can hum the tune than can actually name the piece! Fewer still are aware of just how literal a depiction the music is of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem *Der Zauberlehrling*. The poem retells an old story of The Magician and his Pupil, and Dukas's music follows the story almost line-by-line, with its iconic rhythm uncannily echoing Goethe's relentless heavy-light trochaic meter. The opening evokes the enchanted air of an old sorcerer's workshop. The atmosphere is broken by the apprentice's mischievous excitement to use his newly learned spell to ease the load of his chores. He enchants a broom to fetch the water on his behalf, and here Dukas colourfully depicts the broom coming to life, first twitching once, and then twice, before becoming an unstoppable water-fetching machine and starting a flood. Not knowing how to break the spell, the apprentice splits the broom in two with an axe: an unmissable

violent gesture in the music (where our cellist once broke a string mid-concert!). But each of the broken pieces becomes another broom, doubling the speed of the flood. (We find this an eerie echo of human industry.) As the disaster accelerates hopelessly, the master sorcerer returns and uses his magic to stop the brooms.

With its vivid story-telling, this piece was soon made into a motion picture, first in 1930 in Joseph M. Schenk's *The Wizard's Apprentice*, and then in the widely recognised 1940 Walt Disney animation

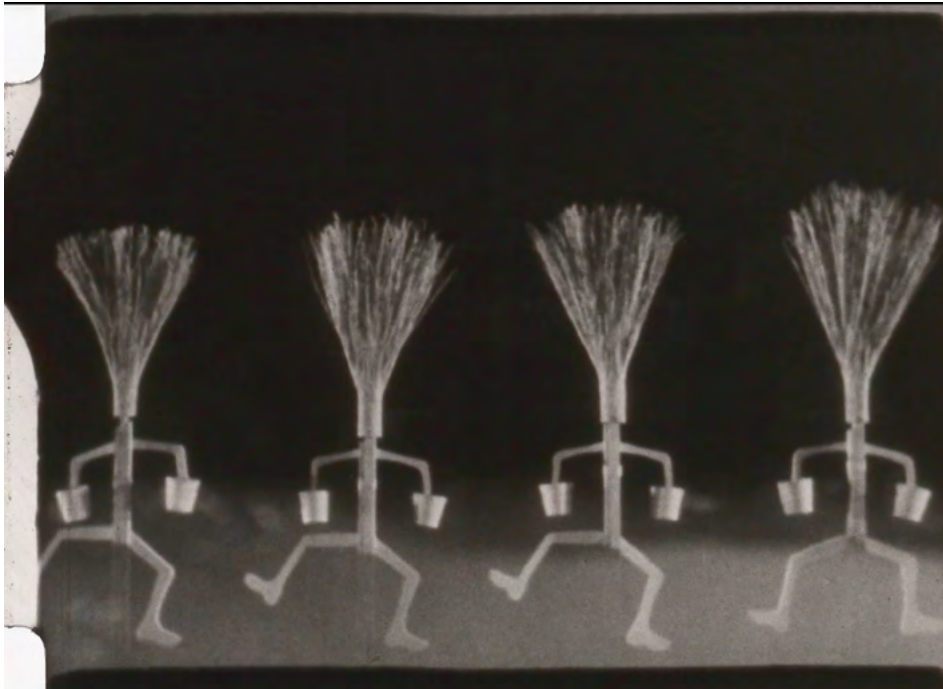


Fig. II, Schenk's film *The Wizard's Apprentice*, still image from 6'06", 1930.

Fantasia with Mickey Mouse as the apprentice. After Goethe, Dukas and Disney, our transcription for piano trio adds another chapter to the tradition of transformation and reimagination of this tale.

Transfigured Night

Arnold Schönberg composed his tone-poem *Verklärte Nacht* in just three weeks in September 1899, based on a poem by his friend Richard Dehmel. Here, transformation takes centre stage, as the poem tells a psychological drama of guilt and forgiveness. From the beginning, we hear the heavy motion of footsteps as a man and woman are “walking through a bare, cold wood”. They are soon joined by the moon, whose light offers a glimmer of hope. Steuermann's transcription from 1932 particularly highlights the various shimmering qualities of the moonlight: we find that this transcription, like Monet's various depictions of the same cathedral, offers another possible experience of this work.

What Steuermann's arrangement lacks—the blended sound of the string sextet—it makes up with a myriad of piano-string textures, the piano's sparkle, and the heightened individuality of the violin and cello. While it is certainly a challenge to play a piece written for six people with only three, we have found the piano trio to be particularly suited to bringing out the tone-poem's shades of light and dark.

The metaphor of light and darkness is, in fact, a central device in the poem's transfiguration. Half way through the poem, after the woman confesses her grief and internal conflict at being pregnant with another man's child, Dehmel brings our attention to how “her dark gaze drowns in light”. The music almost stops at this point, so aptly capturing the moment when we are so lost we cannot see a way out. But a transfiguration takes place the moment this “light” is seen through a different lens. The poem has the man speak about “how brightly the universe shines”, transforming the very same light that encapsulates her dark gaze. (For readers who delight in such details, at this turning point



Fig. III, Arnold Schönberg (third from left) and Eduard Steuermann (third from right) in Berlin, 16 October 1912.

of the piece, the note of the “dark gaze”, a G-flat, turns into a bright F-sharp played by the cello—theoretically the same note, only harmonised differently—sounding a world apart.) The “stranger’s child” is transfigured into their own child through “the glow of an inner warmth” inside the couple. From this turning point in the narrative, there is a further transformation in Steuermann’s arrangement itself. Up to the “dark gaze” moment, the transcription is tormentuously un-trio-like, perhaps intentionally. After the transfigurative moment, Steuermann interprets Schönberg’s writing much more freely, often adding his own pianistic touches. Somehow, the act of transcribing transforms *with* the story of the poem, the sextet becomes a true trio, creatively re-owned.

The Waltz

Our most recent transcription, and one where we have taken the greatest creative license, is Maurice Ravel’s *La Valse*. Unlike Debussy and Dukas, neither of whom produced a mature piano trio, Ravel’s Piano Trio from 1914 is one of the genre’s masterpieces (the best trio of all time—if Linos Piano Trio passionately-pointless-post-practice conversations are to be trusted). The Ravel trio, apart from being perfectly idiomatic for the combination of instruments, is full of dances, virtuosic fireworks and apocalyptic meltdowns, all vital ingredients of *La Valse*. We have therefore taken the Piano Trio as an additional model for our transcription of *La Valse*, alongside the original orchestral score (an enormous orchestra!) and Ravel’s own solo piano version. This gave us an extra insight into trying to reimagine *La Valse* as if the composer had written it for the trio.

Typical of the fastidious Ravel, *La Valse* was composed over a very long period of time, starting as early as 1906, and originally entitled “Vienne” (Vienna). In 1911, Ravel published the piano pieces, *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, a manifestation of the same concept. These pieces contain some of the musical materials that ultimately became *La Valse* in 1920. But unlike the earlier work, *La Valse*

takes the dance to a new level of extremes. In Ravel's own description:

"While some discover an attempt at parody, indeed caricature, others categorically see a tragic allusion in it—the end of the Second Empire, the situation in Vienna after the war, etc.—

This dance may seem tragic, like any other emotion—voluptuousness, joy—pushed to the extreme. But one should only see in it what the music expresses: an ascending progression of sonority, to which the stage comes along to add light and movement."

The "ascending progression" that pushes music "to the extreme" is the central story in *La Valse* (in 1928 Ravel would take the idea of an "ascending progression" even further in *Bolero*). The music starts with a kind of *ur*-waltz: a primordial soup with the beginning of a pulse. This is transformed into a sticky, not-quite-yet-dancing waltz, but with an unmistakable Viennese flavour, before materialising, as if travelling back in time into a full-blown waltz (Ravel envisaged a ballet staging of this piece "Set in an imperial court, about 1855"). The music becomes gradually more opulent, decadent, and finally breaks apart; the composer George Benjamin observes that *La Valse* "plots the birth, decay and destruction of a musical genre: the waltz".

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LINOS PIANO TRIO

The Linos Piano Trio brings together the members' five nationalities and three musical voices into the single artistic vision of "reinventing the repertoire". Pushing at the boundaries of the trio genre, Linos has, since its inception in 2007, championed hidden gems and created new trio transcriptions, alongside its fresh, personal and visceral performances of the core repertoire.

Praised for its "slow-burning, gripping performance" by *The Strad*, and "virtuosity, presence of mind, and wit" by *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the Linos Piano Trio's reputation has taken it to prestigious stages and festivals internationally. With its pioneering spirit, the trio recorded the first complete recording of C.P.E. Bach's Piano Trios (CAvi-music, 2020) which received several five-star reviews from across the European press.

Of the ensemble's numerous awards and affiliations, the Linos Piano Trio was the First Prize and Audience Prize winner of the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition 2015, the 2014 winner of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Albert and Eugenie Frost Prize, and since 2017 holds the position of Carne Ensemble-in-Residence at Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

Linos, in Greek mythology, was a son of Apollo. He received from his father the three-stringed lute, and became known as the inventor of new melodies, lyric songs, and eloquent speech. He was the teacher of Heracles and his brother Orpheus.

Thai-born London-based musician **Prach Boondiskulchok** enjoys a uniquely diverse career as a pianist, fortepianist and composer. Equally at home improvising 18th C. ornaments and composing with microtonal harmonies, Prach's performances have taken him to international stages and festivals. His collaborations have included recitals with Steven Isserlis, Roger Chase, and Leonid Gorokhov. Prach's works include chamber song cycle *Goose Daughter*, premiered in New Orleans, New York, and London in 2016-17, and *Ritus* for String Quartet, commissioned by the Endellion Quartet for its 40th anniversary in 2019, and praised as „a work of great charm“ by The Guardian. Prach is an

artistic researcher at the Orpheus Institute, and teaches piano and chamber music at the Royal College of Music in London.

With his vivid performance style and natural flair for entertaining, London-born German-Brazilian violinist **Konrad Elias-Trostmann** breaks down the wall so often found between audience and performer. Chamber music performances have brought him to venues such as Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre, Seoul Arts Centre, and Sala Cultural Itaím São Paulo. Recently Konrad was appointed Principal 2nd Violin of the Essener Philharmoniker and he is regularly invited as guest Principal 2nd Violin or Assistant Concertmaster by world-renowned orchestras. Konrad is currently based in Cologne and spends his free time doing yoga, enjoying a vibrant social life, and gathering inspiration from the music of some of his greatest influences such as Whitney Houston and Dolly Parton.

Berlin-based French-born multi-faceted musician **Vladimir Waltham** is equally at home on Cello, Baroque Cello, and all sizes of da Gamba instruments. Praised for his “luminous tone” by *Gramophone*, Vladimir is passionate about sharing the broadest possible musical palette, in repertoire spanning from the Middle Ages to collaborations with composers and world premieres as well as everything in between. Vladimir has performed in concert halls all around the world with his ensembles the Linos Piano Trio and La Serenissima, but also regularly appears as a guest soloist and chamber musician in halls and festivals worldwide. When not busy travelling and performing, you can find Vladimir at home enjoying his love of cooking and of coffee, or taking his family on a hike in the mountains.

www.linospianotrio.com



