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LERA AUERBACH
Milking Darkness
Delta Piano Trio



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Gerard Spronk violin
Irene Enzlin cello
Vera Kooper piano

LERA AUERBACH (b. 1973)

Lonely Suite - Ballet for a Lonely Violinist, Op. 70 (for solo violin) (2002)

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|------|
| [1] | I. Dancing with Oneself | 1:58 |
| [2] | II. Boredom | 1:31 |
| [3] | III. No Escape | 1:31 |
| [4] | IV. Imaginary Dialogue | 2:57 |
| [5] | V. Worrysome Thought | 1:09 |
| [6] | VI. Question | 1:05 |

[7] **Piano Trio No. 4*** (2017) 18:34

[8] **Milking Darkness*** (for solo piano) (2011) 10:03

Three Dances in the Old Style, Op. 54 (for violin and cello) (2000)

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------|------|
| [9] | I. Andantino scherzando | 1:43 |
| [10] | II. Andante | 1:35 |
| [11] | III. Andante | 1:20 |

Piano Trio No. 3* (2013, rev. 2018)

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------|------|
| [12] | I. Grandioso | 7:03 |
| [13] | II. Andante libero | 4:42 |
| [14] | III. Adagio religioso | 4:46 |
| [15] | IV. Allegro brutale | 9:41 |

Total time 69:47

* World premiere recordings



Milking Darkness

If you mix every colour of paint, you end up with black. Similarly, the darkness in the music of Lera Auerbach (b. 1973) consists of every imaginable shade of colour, from pitch darkness to dazzling light. The composer thus captures mercurial nature of life and the human psyche. Her music sometimes also depicts a dance with the inescapable: the struggle against Fate, the inexorable passing of time, an unattainable dream – but always with black humour and a dark though starlit sky. ‘Many composers create something “beautiful”, outside human reality,’ according to the Delta Piano Trio, who worked closely together with Auerbach in preparing for this album. ‘Instead, Lera’s music is raw as well as human. She never eases up on what she wants to express, thus fully unleashing everything that is contained in the music.’

That intensity is perceptible even when the forces used are minimal. In *Lonely Suite – Ballet for a Lonely Violinist* (2002), the solitary violin explores the state of being lonely, the music reflecting a recognisable and unsettling condition. Whilst we hear a curious, probing waltz with playful *pizzicati* in *Dancing with Oneself*, the indifferent melody in *Boredom* exudes tedium. Loneliness turns into a hopeless obsession in *No Escape*, a movement that rants and raves. ‘You have the sense of fighting against something, but you can’t describe exactly what it is,’ says Gerard. ‘And you simply don’t have anyone with you. Even though so much is going on in the music, you feel lonelier than ever when playing this movement.’ Illusion seeps into the work in *Imaginary Dialogue* and,

in *Worrisome Thought*, so little happens that it starts to become oppressive. *Question*, the suite’s finale, leaves you despairing. Gerard observes: ‘The music spurs you to think about life.’

But life wouldn’t be life without death. The futile struggle to escape that inevitable darkness is the theme of *Piano Trio No. 4* (2017). It opens with the ringing of a funeral chime in D minor: the key of the requiem. This non-human sound, which Auerbach describes to the Delta Piano Trio as an expression of Fate, recurs throughout the work. It embodies a tension between the inevitable and an agonised protest against it. We hear abrasive sound effects, trills that seem to wail and *glissandi* that attempt to transcend the dark. Yet light seems to shine through to the unfathomable depths: tenuous sounds unveil an impossible dream, the fragile hope of reaching the insurmountable after all. But in the end, the power of death violently smashes that image. Auerbach compares the dragging, descending passage to the fall of Icarus, who succumbs to gravity. Time comes to a standstill: death has appeared and an unearthly requiem sounds.

The natural force at the root of everything is echoed in *Milking Darkness* (2011) for solo piano. The dramatic opening chord encapsulates the beginning of everything, the creation of the cosmos. Above it, mysterious icy notes mark the seconds unrelentingly: nothing affects the passage of time. But in the unwaveringly low, dark chords the twinkling of the stars is also perceptible: there is no darkness without light. ‘On the one hand, Lera portrays the cosmic, the world, the stars and the moon,’ says Vera, ‘and, on the other, there is a

single protagonist for whom the superhuman naturally has no regard. The tension between the two is at the core of this work.' The blackness in *Milking Darkness* is all-encompassing. 'Lera is extremely bold in her use of these dark colours, but she doesn't lose her sense of humour. It's a form of self-mockery to call your composition *Milking Darkness*.'

That humour is also at the root of *Three Dances in the Old Style* (2000) for violin and cello. The graceful melodies could have been taken straight from the eighteenth century, but elements like distorted string sounds, long-drawn-out *glissandi* and the missing final note of the second movement make the work a caricature. Yet the dark undertone is never far off: the three movements are all in minor keys and passages with rarefied sound effects give the dances that haunting sound so peculiar to Auerbach. They evoke a feeling of uneasiness: is the humour perhaps also an illusion that masks something sinister?

Making music almost becomes acting in the monumental *Piano Trio No. 3* (2013, rev. 2018). A theatrical piece, it abounds with contrasts, extremes and a variety of characters. The ferocious opening chords yield to a dreamy, ethereal atmosphere. This abruptly turns to passionate madness, with pronounced rhythms and wild capriciousness. The second movement even opens with an intense cluster chord. 'Lera conceived a sort of choreography to go with it,' says Vera. 'I have to keep my arms on the keys for a long time. Lera often says that the visual aspect of playing matters a lot to her. It's the performance as a whole, not just the music.' Out of nowhere, the violin begins a waltz, but not just any waltz. Rather, it is a somewhat sickly imitation

of a musical saw, culminating in a grotesque, drunken dance brimming with *glissandi*. Auerbach describes the third movement as a prayer, a search for the inner voice while the inescapable remains palpable in its harmonic progression. A proud dance brings the work to a close, with an unearthly, slow theme once again conjuring up the unattainable dream – which the finale then shatters.

It was Auerbach's own idea to call this album *Milking Darkness*. The Delta Piano Trio feels that it is a fitting description not only of her work as a whole but also of the intense effect her music can have. 'We've always been impressed how a piece by Lera can really enthral an audience,' says Irene. 'Everyone in the hall often holds their breath. We can't count the number of times listeners have told us that it was her piece that made the deepest impression on them, an experience not to be forgotten.'

Simone Leuven

Translation: Ian Gaukroger/Muse Translations



Delta Piano Trio

Untainted and uncompromising musicality coupled with exceptional interpretive depth characterize the playing of the Delta Piano Trio, founded in Salzburg in 2013 by the three Dutch musicians Gerard Spronk, Irene Enzlin and Vera Kooper. The trio completed its studies in Salzburg, Paris and Basel with Wolfgang Redik (Vienna Piano Trio), Rainer Schmidt (Hagen Quartet), Anton Kernjak and with Trio Wanderer.

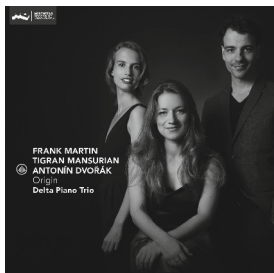
Numerous prizes and awards underline the trio's reputation, including first prizes at the international chamber music competitions Stasys Vainiunas in Lithuania, Salieri-Zinetti in Italy, Orlando in the Netherlands, at the Orpheus chamber music competition in Switzerland and, in particular, the highly endowed Kersjesprijs, the most important chamber music prize in the Netherlands, awarded in December 2020.

The Delta Piano Trio has toured Europe, Russia, Israel, China, South Korea, Indonesia, and the United States, and has performed in concert halls such as The Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, the Gangdong Arts Center in Seoul, St. John's Smith Square in London, and the Jerusalem Music Center. The trio collaborates regularly with contemporary composers and maintains a collaborative relationship with composer Lera Auerbach. They frequently give chamber music masterclasses and love coaching younger ensembles.



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Gerard Spronk has a violin made by Antonio Gragnani in 1773 on loan from the collection of the Dutch Musical Instruments Foundation.

Irene Enzlin has a cello made by Thomas Bertrand in 2006 on loan from the collection of the Dutch Musical Instruments Foundation.

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